

A Mess of Pottage

William MacDonald:

"Esau ... for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Hebrews 12:16

It is often possible to barter life's best values for a momentary gratification of physical appetite.

That is what Esau did. He had come in from the field tired and hungry. At that moment Jacob was cooking a pot of red bean soup. When Esau asked for a bowl of the "red stuff," Jacob said, in effect, "Sure, I'll give you some if you'll sell me your birthright in return."

Now the birthright was a valuable privilege which belonged to the oldest son in a family. It was valuable because it gave him the place of eventual headship in the family or tribe and entitled him to a double portion of the inheritance.

But at that moment, Esau considered the birthright worthless. What good is a birthright, he thought, to a man who is as famished as I? His hunger seemed so overpowering that he was willing to give almost anything to satisfy it. In order to pacify a momentary appetite, he was willing to surrender something that was of enduring value. And so he made the awful bargain!

A similar drama is being reenacted almost daily. Here is a man who has maintained a good testimony for years. He has the love of a fine family and the respect of his Christian fellowship. When he speaks, his words carry spiritual authority, and his service has the blessing of God upon it. He is a model believer.

But then comes the moment of fierce passion. It seems as if he is being consumed by the fires of sexual temptation. All of a sudden nothing seems so important as the satisfaction of this physical drive. He abandons the power of rational thought. He is willing to sacrifice everything for this illicit alliance.

And so he takes the insane plunge! For that moment of passion, he exchanges the honor of God, his own testimony, the esteem of his family, the respect of his friends and the power of a sterling Christian character. Or as Alexander Maclaren said, "He forgets his longings after righteousness; flings away the joys of divine communion; darkens his soul; ends his prosperity; brings down upon his head for all his remaining years a cataract of calamities; and makes his name and his religion a target for the barbed sarcasms of each succeeding generation of scoffers."

In the classic words of Scripture, he sells his birthright for a mess of pottage.

An Overview of Ecclesiastes

William MacDonald:

The Book of Ecclesiastes describes Solomon's search for the meaning of life, by his own unaided intellect and apart from divine revelation. His conclusion was that life is vanity and as futile as chasing the wind.

We know the book was written by Solomon because he was the only son of David who was king in Jerusalem, 1. 1. We do not know what period of his life he is describing.

The key to the book is the expression 'under the sun.' It occurs 29 times. Solomon tries to solve the riddle of life by his own wisdom and by his own observations. His conclusions are the same as you and I might draw if we did not have a Bible.

Two expressions confirm that the book represents man's wisdom under the sun. In 3. 18, Solomon said in his heart that men are like beasts. He said this in his heart. He is speaking from personal observation and not from divine wisdom. Then in 3. 21, he said, 'Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the beast, who goes down to the earth?' This is not divine revelation but human ignorance. He says that nobody knows. However, we know what happens at the time of death, because we have the Bible.

If this book contains nothing more than human wisdom, why did God allow it to be included in the Scriptures? Its purpose is to save us from walking the same dreary path of frustration, pessimism, and meaninglessness. If the wisest and richest man could not find fulfilment 'under the sun,' what chance do we have?

Because the findings are 'under the sun,' some of them are true, some are half-true, and some are not true at all. Some are true, e.g. 'A good name is better than ointment,' 7. 1a; 'For there is not a just man who does good and does not sin,' 7. 20. Some are only half-true, e.g. 'And the day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth,' 7. 1b. This is true only if the person is a believer. Some are not true at all, e.g., the earth does not abide forever, 1. 4; man does have an advantage over beasts, 3. 19; the dead do have knowledge, 9. 5; 'do not be overly righteous,' 7. 16, is not good advice, God would never say that. On the contrary, He does say, 'My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin,' 1 John 2. 1. In other words, don't sin at all.

The fact that there are untruths in the book does not affect its inspiration. The inspiration of the sacred word does not guarantee the truthfulness of what the devil says, Gen. 3. 4-5, or of what man says by his own wisdom. God said to Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, 'You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has,' Job 42. 8. Yet, Eliphaz's words are in the Bible. The Lord gives a faithful record of what is said and done, and that record is inspired even if it records some of man's mistakes. He wanted those things to be in the word for our instruction and correction.

Solomon uses Elohim for the name of God in these twelve chapters, never the name Jehovah. Anyone can know that there is an Elohim, that is, a Mighty One. But the name Jehovah speaks of God in covenant relation with man. A fool can know that there is an Elohim, but only a believer can know Him as Jehovah.

The king tried to find fulfilment in education, pleasure, materialism, wealth, music, philosophy, status, and sex, 1. 17 - 2. 11, but concluded that life is meaningless and futile. The argument is that if the richest and wisest could not find fulfilment in these things, what chance do we have? 'For what can the man do who succeeds the king?' 2. 12.

In chapter 3. 1-8 he listed 28 activities of life, half of which seem to be active and the others counteractive. Usually the second member of each pair cancels the first. Fourteen minus fourteen equals zero.

This would seem to imply that life is a big zero. The king concluded that when it comes to dying, man has no advantage over a beast. They all go to the grave, 3. 18- 22. Accumulating riches is folly; when a man dies, he leaves it all, perhaps to a son who is a fool. The son did not work hard for it, so he goes out and wastes it.

Mingled with some words of wisdom are many other expressions of pessimism. The struggle of life simply is not worth it.

The king covers most of the spectrum of human life. He tackles the main questions that plague mankind, and comes up with his own answers. Because God's ways and works are inscrutable, the best philosophy of life is to have a good time while you can. Solomon grieves over injustice, wickedness, and inequalities. The

An Overview of Ecclesiastes

competitive spirit is vanity. Religion that is insincere is vanity. The insatiable desire for more is vanity. All is vanity.

Did Solomon ever get above the sun in this book? The jury is still out on that question. There is no agreement among students of the word. I don't think he did.

His closing advice for young people to remember their Creator is reinforced by a classic description of old age with its multiple infirmities, 12. 1-7. It is a masterpiece of symbolic literature. Jesus summarized the message of Ecclesiastes when He said, 'Whoever drinks of this water [the world] will thirst again', John 4. 13. Only God can fill the vacuum of the human heart. The way of fulfilment is to get above the sun where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

Appear Before The Judgment Seat of Christ

William MacDonald:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10)

While it is true, as we have seen on the previous page, that there are no degrees of fitness for heaven, it is also true that there will be degrees of reward in heaven. The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a place of review and reward where some will be rewarded more than others.

Also there will be differing capacities for enjoying the glories of heaven. Everyone will be happy but some will have greater capacity for happiness than others. Everyone’s cup will be full but some will have bigger cups than others.

We must get away from the idea that we will all be exactly alike when we reach the glorified state. The Bible nowhere teaches such dull, faceless uniformity. Rather it teaches that crowns will be awarded for lives of faithfulness and devotedness, and that while some are being rewarded, others will suffer loss.

Here are two young men who are the same age and who are converted at the same time. One goes out and lives the next forty years by giving top priority to the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The other gives the best of his life to making money. The first talks enthusiastically about the things of the Lord, the second about activity in the market. The first has a greater capacity for enjoying the Lord now, and he will take that greater capacity to heaven. The second, though equally fit for heaven through the Person and work of Christ, is spiritually dwarfed, and he takes that reduced capacity to heaven.

Day by day we are determining the rewards that we will receive and the measure to which we will enjoy our eternal home. We determine it by our knowledge of the Bible and our obedience to it, by our prayer life, by our fellowship with God’s people, by our service for the Lord, and by our faithful stewardship of all that God has given to us. As soon as we realize that we are building for eternity with every passing day, it should have a profound effect on the choices we make and the priorities we set.

Assurance of Eternal Life

William MacDonald:

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)

Some of us will be eternally thankful to God for this verse because it taught us that assurance of salvation comes first and foremost through the Word of God and not through feelings. The Bible was written, among other reasons, so that those who believe on the Name of the Son of God can know that they have eternal life.

We can be thankful that assurance does not come through feelings, because they fluctuate with every passing day. “God does not ask the soul to say, ‘Thank God I feel so good,’ but turns the eye another way, to Jesus and His Word.” When someone once asked Martin Luther, “Do you feel that your sins have been forgiven?” he replied, “No, but I’m as sure of it as that there’s a God in heaven. For feelings come and feelings go/ And feelings are deceiving/ My warrant is the Word of God/ Naught else is worth believing.” C. I. Scofield reminds us that “justification takes place in the mind of God and not in the nervous system of the believer.” H. A. Ironside used to say, “I don’t know I am saved because I feel happy, but I feel happy because I know I am saved.” And he knew he was saved by the written Word of God.

When we read that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God (Rom. 8:16), we must remember that the Spirit witnesses to us primarily through the Scriptures. We read John 6:47, for instance, “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” We know that we have trusted in Christ for our eternal salvation; He is our only hope for heaven. The Spirit of God therefore witnesses to us through this verse that we are sons of God.

Of course, there are other means of assurance. We know we are saved because we love the brethren; because we hate sin and practice righteousness; because we love the Word of God; and because we have the instinct of prayer. But the first and fundamental means of assurance is the surest, most dependable thing in the universe, the Word of God. George Cutting said it well in his memorable tract *Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment*: “It’s the blood that makes us safe; it’s the Word that makes us sure.”

William MacDonald:

“...as dying, and, behold, we live.” (2 Cor. 6:9)

The Bible is full of paradoxes, that is, truths that seem contrary to what we would normally suppose or truths that seem to contradict one another. G. K. Chesterton maintained that paradox is truth standing on its head to attract attention. Here are a few of the paradoxes trying to attract our attention.

We save our lives by losing them; we lose our lives by loving them (Mark 8:35).

We are strong when we are weak (2 Cor. 12:10), and powerless in our own strength (John 15:5).

We find perfect freedom in being Christ’s slave, and bondage when we are free from His yoke (Rom. 6:17-20).

We find more joy in sharing what we have than we do in getting more. Or, in the words of our Lord, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

We increase what we have through scattering it, and experience poverty through hoarding it (Prov. 11:24).

We have a new nature that cannot sin (1 John 3:9), yet everything we do is stained by sin (1 John 1:8).

We conquer by yielding (Gen. 32:24-28) and experience defeat by fighting (1 Pet. 5:5c).

We are abased when we exalt ourselves, but He exalts us when we abase ourselves (Lu. 14:11).

We are enlarged by pressure (Psa. 4:1 JND) and shrunk by prosperity (Jer. 48:11).

We can possess all things, yet have nothing; we can be poor, yet make many rich (2 Cor. 6:10).

When we are wise (in man’s view) then we are fools (in God’s sight), but when we are fools for Christ’s sake, then we are truly wise (1 Cor. 1:20, 21).

The life of faith brings freedom from care and anxiety; the life of sight brings fear of loss through moths, rust and thieves (Matt. 6:19).

The poet sees the Christian life as paradox from start to finish:

How strange is the course that a person must steer,
How perplexed is the path he must tread;
The hope of his happiness rises from fear,
And his life he receives from the dead.
His fairest pretensions must wholly be waived,
And his best resolutions be crossed;
Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved
Till he finds himself utterly lost.
When all this is done, and his heart is assured
Of the total remission of sins;
When his pardon is signed and his peace is procured,
From that moment his conflict begins. (Selected).

Cast Thy Bread Upon the Waters

William MacDonald:

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” (Eccl. 11:1)

Bread here is probably used, figuratively, for the grain from which it is made. In Egypt, seed was sown on flooded areas. As the waters receded, the crop came forth. But it did not happen immediately. The harvest came “after many days.”

Today we live in an “instant” society, and we want instant results. We have instant mashed potatoes, instant tea, coffee and cocoa, instant soup and instant oatmeal. Also, we have instant credit at the bank and instant replays on TV.

But it is not like that in Christian life and service. Our kindnesses are not rewarded immediately. Our prayers are not always answered right away. And our service does not usually produce immediate results.

The Bible repeatedly uses the agricultural cycle to illustrate spiritual service. “A sower went forth to sow...” “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” It is a gradual process, over an extended period of time. The squash grows more quickly than an oak tree, but it still takes time.

Therefore, to expect instant results from our uncalculating deeds of kindness is unrealistic. To expect immediate answers to prayer is immature. To press for a decision the first time a person hears the Gospel is unwise. Certainly the normal experience is to give, pray and serve untiringly over a protracted period of time. You do so with the confidence that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. After a while, you see results, not enough to inflate you with pride, but enough to encourage you to press on. The full results will not be known till we reach heaven—which is—after all, the best and safest place to see the fruit of our labors.

Christ Warned Against Titles

William MacDonald:

“...you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ.” (Matt. 23:8-10 RSV)

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples against high-sounding titles that cater to the ego and put self in the place of the Trinity. God is our Father, Christ is our Master, the Holy Spirit is our Teacher. We should not arrogate these titles to ourselves in the assembly. In the world, of course, we have an earthly father, in our work we have a master or employer, and in school we have teachers. But in the spiritual realm, the members of the Godhead fill these roles and should be honored exclusively as such.

God is our Father in the sense that He is the Giver of life. Christ is our Master because we belong to Him and are subject to His direction. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher because He is the Author and Interpreter of Scripture; all our teaching must be guided by Him.

How strange, then, that churches perpetuate honorific titles just as if Christ had never warned against them. Priests and ministers are still called Father and Padre and are sometimes referred to as Dominie, meaning Lord. Clergymen regularly use the title “Reverend,” a word that is used in the Bible only of God (see Psa. 111:9, “...reverend and holy is his name.”) The title “Doctor” comes from the Latin docere, to teach. So doctor means teacher. The degree, whether earned or honorary, may come from an institution that is a pesthouse of infidelity rather than a bulwark of the Christian faith. Yet when a man is introduced as “Doctor” in the assembly, the implication is that his words have added authority because of his degree. This, of course, is completely unfounded. A hunchbacked garbage collector, filled with the Holy Spirit, may speak more truly as an oracle of God.

There is a place for titles in the so-called secular world. The principle that applies in that sphere is “Render therefore to all their dues: ...honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:7). But the principle that applies in the assembly is laid down by the Lord in the words, “...you are all brethren” (Matt. 23:8 RSV).

William MacDonald:

THE LORD'S SUPPER

This solemn act of remembrance was instituted by the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal. Immediately after He had celebrated the last Passover with His disciples, He introduced what we know as the Lord's supper. "He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.' Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you' (Luke 22:19, 20).

1. Why Keep the Feast?

With regard to the significance of this ordinance, certain facts are presented. First, it is an occasion for remembrance. The Savior said, "This do in remembrance of Me." It is a time to remember His sufferings and death, the giving of His body, the shedding of His blood. Here Calvary with all its sacred associations passes before the minds of the participants. It is quite impossible thus to remember the passion of the Lord Jesus without responding to God with worship and praise. Thus the Lord's supper is a time of public worship, a time of adoring God for all He is and all He has done.

Then again, the Lord's supper is a public witness to the unity of the body of Christ. The loaf of bread is a picture of the body of Christ, made up of all true believers. In partaking of the bread, the believer testifies that he is one with every true child of God. In drinking of the cup, he acknowledges that he is one with everyone who has been cleansed by the precious blood (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17).

Finally, the Lord's supper is a constant reminder that the One who instituted this memorial of Himself is coming again. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Thus, the worshipper not only looks back to Golgotha and remembers Him in His death, he not only looks upward to the Throne of God and praises Him for an accomplished redemption, but he also looks forward to that moment when the Lord will descend from heaven and take His waiting people home.

2. As Oft As Ye Do

With regard to the time and frequency of the Lord's supper, the Scriptures do not command in the language of law, but entreat with the voice of grace. In Acts 20:7, it is stated that "upon the first day of the week, . . . the disciples came together to break bread. The first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Sunday. It is the day of the Lord's resurrection and a fitting day for His people to meet together for worship and remembrance. The instruction is, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The moment a person says it must be observed every week, or month, or quarter, he has gone beyond what the Bible says. At the same time, the probability is very strong that the early disciples met every week to remember the Lord.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon argued strongly for a weekly observance of the Lord's supper. "My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God's people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord's Table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance-it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on the Lord's day, whatever the subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread, and showing forth the death of Christ till He come. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord's day celebrating His supper will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons."

Jonathan Edwards also was an advocate of a weekly remembrance of the Lord. "It seems plain by the Scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the sufferings of their dear Redeemer every Lord's Day, and so I believe it will be again in the church of Christ in days that are approaching.

3. Eligibility

It should scarcely need to be mentioned that the Lord's supper is only for Christians. Only those who have

been redeemed are eligible and capable of entering into its sacred meaning. Christians themselves should partake of the emblems in a judged condition (1 Corinthians 11:28). Sin must be confessed and forsaken, and the emblems must be taken in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11: 21, 22). All who partake without judging themselves are in danger of being chastened by the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29-32).

Here again it is good to remind ourselves that it is possible to eat the bread and drink the wine without really remembering the Lord. It is possible to reduce this ordinance to a mere ritual if our heart does not answer to what we are doing in symbol. Our lives must be in fellowship with God if we are truly to obey His words, "Remember me."

PRAYER

Not very much information is given in the New Testament concerning the meetings of the local church. we do know that the Christians assembled for fellowship, prayer, ministry of the Word, and breaking of bread (Acts 2:42); but beyond that there seems to be a veil. As far as gospel testimony is concerned, that appears to have been carried on by the individual Christian outside the confines of the assembly, wherever the unsaved could be reached, but always with the idea of bringing the ones who were saved into the fellowship of a local church.

In all the gatherings of the early assemblies, certainly nothing was more prominent than prayer. In fact, the church was born in the wake of prayer (Acts 1:14), and thereafter the Christians "continued steadfastly in prayer" (Acts 2:42). The Book of Acts presents numerous instances of prayer, at all times and in all places. Indeed, the entire history of the church is a tribute to the faithfulness of God who answers prayer.

1. A Special Promise

We do well to remind ourselves constantly that collective prayer not only has divine sanction, but carries with it a special promise of the presence of the Lord Himself. In Matthew 18:19 and 20, we read, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Language could scarcely be clearer than this. We have a twofold pledge that cannot be broken. First, when two believers are united in presenting a petition to God, that request is answered. Secondly, when Christians are gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, He is there in their midst. The trouble is that we do not believe it. If we did, our prayer meetings would be filled, and our churches would be on fire for God.

2. How to Pray as a Group

In considering the subject of collective prayer, we should like at the outset to present a few elementary facts concerning it. First of all, in a prayer meeting, one person leads at a time. The others are silent, but actually all are praying. The one whose voice is audible is expressing the prayers of the group. The others follow him as he prays, and makes his prayer their own. Oftentimes they express this unity of spirit by saying "Amen." Next, we want to mention that there is a big difference between "saying prayers" and praying. There is a children's hymn which makes this distinction:

I often say my prayers ; But do I ever pray?

And do the wishes of my heart ; Go with the words I say?

I may as well kneel down; And worship gods of stone

As offer to the living God; A prayer of words alone.

For words without the heart; The Lord will never hear;

Nor will He to those lips attend; Whose prayers are not sincere.

There is nothing that will kill a prayer meeting more quickly than a series of rehearsed prayers where there is no real heart interest. Too often we just go through a list of empty petitions. The prayers of young converts are usually refreshing because they are spontaneous and fresh. But older Christians frequently fall into a pattern of

prayer that is useless for God or man. It has been well said, "Meetings where prayers are offered from a sense of duty only, need closing down."

Another danger that should be avoided is long prayers. It is true that Scripture says "Pray without ceasing," but this does not authorize an individual to monopolize the time in the prayer meeting. If the prayers are short and many men take part, the interest will be increased.

Then, too, our requests should be specific. Do not pray, "God, save many souls throughout the world." Better pray, "Lord, save my brother, David." Then when David is saved, you will know your prayer has been answered and you will be encouraged to pray for others by name.

3. Be Specific

There is no reason why any prayer meeting should be a dull affair. There are plenty of specific requests which we can bring to the Throne of Grace. Here are a few of them.

Pray for those who are in authority over us, mentioning them by name. Pray that they might be saved, and that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:2).

Pray for those who are sick in your church. The Lord knows who they are, but maybe some of the Christians don't, so give their names.

Pray for unsaved relatives and friends. We should never be ashamed to have our loved ones mentioned in the prayer meeting. If we really want them to be saved, we will welcome the prayer support of the church.

Pray for the elders in the church. They have important responsibilities which require wisdom and patience. They deserve an interest in your supplications.

Pray for missionaries who have gone out from your local church. if you correspond with them from time to time, you will know what problems they are facing and what their needs might be.

Pray for the Sunday School, for its superintendent, for the teachers, and for the boys and girls who are being taught the Word of God.

Pray for the poor. If it would cause embarrassment to anyone present, it might be better to withhold names in this instance.

Pray for the men and women from your assembly in the armed forces. They face dangers, temptations and trials. They need your prayers.

Pray for those who are engaged in the work of the Lord, such as evangelists and teachers.

Then in your prayers be sure to include thanksgiving. This is forcefully brought before us in Philippians 4:6. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

The Lord rightfully expects His people to be thankful. Ingratitude for all His mercies is sin.

4. Important Conditions

But are there not conditions that must be observed if our prayers are to be answered? Indeed there are!

First, we must abide in Christ. He said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,, (John 15:7). Abiding in Christ is keeping His commandments, doing His will, obeying His Word.

Secondly, our prayers should be according to His will. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Since the general outline of God's will is found in the Bible, our requests should be scriptural.

Third, our requests should be offered in the Name of Christ. “And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you” (John 16:23). When we truly ask in His Name, it is the same as if He were making the request to God.

Finally, our motives must be pure. James reminds us that we ask and receive not because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts (James 4:3). If our motives are selfish and sinful, we cannot expect an answer.

5. A Few Rules to Remember

There are a few more do’s and don’t’s which should be mentioned if our prayer meetings are going to be “the power-house of the church.” For instance, do not pray to be seen. The hypocrites, you remember, love to stand praying in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men (Matthew 6:5). Again, do not ask God to do something you can do yourself. We ask God to bring the unsaved into our Gospel meetings. Does He not expect us to use our lips to invite them and our cars to bring them? And be careful that you do not ask for something you know you should not have. God sometimes grants such requests but sends leanness to the soul (Psalm 106:15). Do not be discouraged if the answer does not come immediately. God’s answers are never too early lest we miss the blessedness of waiting upon Him; they are never too late lest we fear we have trusted Him in vain. Then, if God’s answer is not just exactly what you asked for, remember this! The Lord reserves the right to give us something better than we ask for. We do not know what is best for us, but He does, and so He gives us more than we could ever ask or think.

Finally let us emphasize that there can be no real progress in the church without prayer. We can go through a routine, and produce even seeming results, but nothing is accomplished for God apart from intercession. If we do not see this conclusion from the Scriptures, we will be soon driven to it by sheer necessity.

De Profundis - Out of the Depths

William MacDonald:

"He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." Galatians 6:8

No one can sin and get away with it. The results of sin are not only inescapable, they are extremely bitter. Sin may look like a harmless kitty but it eventually devours like a pitiless lion.

The supposed glamour of sin receives wide coverage. We seldom hear the other side. Few leave behind a description of their downfall and subsequent misery.

One of Ireland's most brilliant authors did. This man began to dabble in unnatural vice. One thing led to another until he became embroiled in lawsuits and finally landed in prison, where he wrote the following:

"The gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring: I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colour of things: There was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder ... I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction: I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me: I summoned up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram.

"Along with these things, I had things that were different. I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a flaneur, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensations. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetops.. .I ended in horrible disgrace."

Defiling the Temple of God

William MacDonald:

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Cor. 3:17)

In this verse, the temple of God refers to the local assembly. Paul is not speaking to individual Christians but to believers collectively when he says “which temple ye (plural) are.” The saints in Corinth comprised a temple of God.

It is also true, of course, that individual believers are a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle brings this out in 1 Corinthians 6:19: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” The Holy Spirit of God dwells in the body of every child of God.

But in our text for today it is the assembly that is in view. Paul is saying that if any man destroys the assembly, God will destroy him. It is the same word that is translated “defile” and “destroy” in this verse. It is used of marring a local church by leading it away from that condition of holiness of life and purity of doctrine in which it should abide, and of God’s retributive destruction of the offender who is guilty of this sin” (W. E. Vine).

So our verse warns us that it is a serious thing to tamper with a local fellowship. In fact, it is a form of self-destruction. Yet how diffident people often are in this very area. Here is a man who doesn’t get his own way in the assembly. Or he becomes involved in a violent personality clash with some other brother. Rather than make things right in a Scriptural manner, he lines up people to take his side and forms a faction in the church. Things go from bad to worse and soon there is an open split.

Or perhaps it is a carnal sister who carries on a campaign of gossip and back-biting against someone else. Her slanderous tongue lashes out until the church is filled with bitterness and strife. She will not stop until a once-prosperous assembly lies in ruins.

People like this are playing a perilous game. They cannot get away with it. The Great God of the universe is committed to wreck those who wreck His assembly. Let all who are inclined to faction beware!

Denying The Resurrection of Christ

William MacDonald:

“And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. ”(Matt. 28:12, 13)

The Lord Jesus had no sooner risen from the dead when His enemies began to fabricate an alibi to explain away the miracle. The best falsehood that they could concoct at that time was that the disciples came by night and stole the body. (The swoon theory, suggesting that Jesus did not really die but only swooned, didn't surface till centuries later.) Unfortunately for the theft theory, as for all the other theories, it raises more questions than it answers. For example:

Why didn't the chief priests and elders question the original report of the guards concerning the empty tomb? They accepted it as true and hastened to devise an explanation as to how it had happened.

Why were the soldiers sleeping when they should have been on watch? The Roman penalty for sleeping on duty was death. Yet they were promised immunity from punishment. Why?

How could all the soldiers have fallen asleep at the same time? It taxes credulity to think they would all have risked death for a time of sleep.

How could the disciples have rolled the stone without waking the guards? The stone was large and could not be moved noiselessly.

How could the disciples have moved the stone at all? In a typical Herodian-style tomb, the stone was rolled till it fell down into a lower slot. It was easier to seal such a tomb than it was to open it. Besides, the tomb had been made as “sure” as the Roman authorities were able to make it.

Is it likely that the disciples, recently so fearful that they fled for their lives, would have the courage to face the Roman guards and rob the sepulcher? They would know that such an offense was punishable by a severe sentence.

If the soldiers were all asleep, how did they know that the disciples had stolen the body?

If the disciples stole the body, why did they take time to remove the graveclothes and fold the napkin? (Luke 24:12; John 20:6, 7). Why would the disciples want to steal the body?

There was no reason. Actually they were surprised and incredulous when they learned He had risen.

Finally, would the disciples, honorable men that they were, go forth and preach the resurrection at great personal risk if they knew it was a lie? Paul Little said, “Men do not die for what they know is a lie.” They sincerely believed that Jesus has risen. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

William MacDonald:

Read Luke 16:1-13

It was to the disciples that the parable of the unjust steward was spoken. In it, the Savior sets forth principles that apply to disciples of all time. After all, the disciples of Christ are essentially stewards, entrusted with the care of His property and His interests here on earth.

The parable bristles with difficulties. It seems to commend dishonesty and crookedness. But when understood in its proper light, it is laden with instruction of greatest importance.

The story in brief is this. A wealthy property owner had hired an employee to care for his business. In the course of time, the master learned that this employee was squandering his money. Immediately he demanded an audit of the books, then gave him notice that his employment would be terminated.

The employee realized that his future prospects were dismal. He was too old to do hard, physical labor, and he was ashamed to beg. So he hit upon a scheme that would assure him friends for the days ahead. He went to one of his master's accounts and asked, "How much do you owe my boss?" The answer was "Seven hundred and fifty gallons of oil." "Well," said the employee, "pay for half that amount and we'll call it even." He went to another of his employer's debtors and asked, "How much do you owe?" The customer replied, "Eight hundred bushels of wheat." "I see; well, you pay me six hundred and forty bushels, and we'll consider the account closed."

Even more shocking than the action of the dishonest employee is the comment that follows:

"And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely; for the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the children of light" (v. 8, Revised Version).

How are we to understand this apparent approval of dishonest business practices?

One thing is certain. Neither his lord nor our Lord commended such crookedness. It was this very thing that caused him to be dismissed in the first place. No righteous person could ever approve of such cheating and unfaithfulness. Whatever else the parable teaches, it does not suggest that embezzlement is ever justified.

There is only one thing for which the unjust steward could be commended, that is, that he planned for the future. He took steps to insure that he would still have friends after his stewardship had ended. He acted for "then" instead of "now."

That is the point of the parable. Worldly people take forceful action to provide for the days ahead. The only future they are concerned about is their old age, their years of retirement. So they work diligently to make sure that they will be comfortably situated when they are no longer able to carry on gainful employment. No stone is left unturned in their quest for social security.

In this respect, the unsaved are wiser than Christians. However, in order to understand why, we must realize that the Christian's future is not on this earth but in heaven. This is the crucial point. The future for an unbeliever means the time between now and the grave. The future for a child of God means eternity with Christ.

The parable teaches then that the unregenerate are more wise and aggressive in preparing for their future on earth than Christians are for theirs in heaven.

With this background, the Lord Jesus presents the practical application of the lesson:

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

The mammon of unrighteousness is money or other material possessions. We can use these things for winning souls to Christ. People won through our faithful use of money are here called "friends." A day is coming when we will fail (either die or be taken to heaven by Christ at the Rapture). Friends won through the wise use of our material possessions will then serve as a welcoming committee to receive us into the everlasting dwelling places.

This is the way in which wise stewards plan for the future—not by spending their little lives in a vain quest for security on earth; but in a passionate endeavor to be surrounded in heaven by friends who were won to Christ through their money. Money that was converted into Bibles, Testaments, scripture portions, tracts, and other Christian literature. Money that was used to support missionaries and other Christian workers. Money that helped to finance Christian radio programs and other worthy Christian activities. In short, money that was used for the spread of the gospel in any and every way. “The only way we can lay up our treasures in heaven is to put them into something that is going to heaven.”

When a Christian sees that his material possessions can be used in the salvation of precious souls, he loses his love for “things.” Luxury, wealth and material splendor turn sour in his stomach. He longs to see the mammon of unrighteousness converted by divine alchemy into worshippers of the Lamb forever and ever. He is captivated by the possibility of doing a work in human lives that will bring eternal glory to God and eternal blessing to the people themselves. He feels something of the thirst of Rutherford:

O if one soul from Anworth
Meets me at God's right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Immanuel's land.

Anne R. Cousin

To him all the diamonds, rubies and pearls, all the bank deposits, all the insurance policies, all the mansions, pleasure boats and magnificent cars are but mammon of unrighteousness. If used for self, they perish with the using, but if spent for Christ, they reap dividends throughout eternity.

The manner in which we deal with material things, the extent to which we grasp them is a test of our character. The Lord emphasizes this in verse 10:

The man who is dependable in a very small matter is dependable also in a large deal, the man who is dishonest in a very small matter is dishonest also in a large deal (Williams' Translation).

Here the very small matter is the stewardship of material things. Those who are dependable are the ones who use these things for the glory of God and the blessing of their fellow men. Those who are dishonest are the ones who use their possessions for comfort, luxurious living and selfish enjoyment. If a man cannot be trusted in a small matter (material things), how could he be trusted in a large deal (the stewardship of spiritual things). If a man is dishonest with the mammon of unrighteousness, how can he expect to be faithful as a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1).

The Savior therefore presses the argument a step further:

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches (verse 11).

Earthly treasures are not true riches; their value is finite and temporal. Spiritual treasures are true riches; their value cannot be measured and will never end. Unless a man is dependable in his handling of material things, he cannot expect God to trust him with spiritual prosperity in this life or treasures in heaven.

Again the Lord extends the argument by saying:

And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own (verse 12, Revised Version).

Material things are not our own; they belong to God. Everything that we possess is a sacred stewardship from God. All that can be called our own are the fruits of our diligent study and service here, and the rewards of faithful stewardship there. If we have not proved dependable in handling God's property, then we cannot expect to enter into the deep truths of God's Word in this life, or to be rewarded in the next.

With climactic emphasis, the Lord then summarized the teaching of the entire parable:

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the

Disciples Are Stewards

one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (verse 13).

There cannot be divided allegiance. A disciple cannot live for two worlds. A steward either loves God or loves mammon. If he loves mammon, he hates God.

And, mind you, this was written to disciples, not to the unsaved.

William MacDonald:

“There are some eunuchs...which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (Matthew 19:12).

One of the major questions to be faced by every disciple is whether God has called him to married life or to celibacy. This is entirely a matter of individual guidance from the Lord. No one can legislate for another, and to interfere in such a vital sphere is a perilous business.

The general teaching of the Word of God is that marriage was instituted by God for the human race, with several purposes in mind:

1. It was ordained for companionship and pleasure. God saw that “it is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).
2. It was designed for the procreation of the race. This is indicated by the Lord’s command, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28).
3. It was arranged for the preservation of purity in the family and in society. “To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife” (1 Corinthians 7:2).

There is nothing in the Word of God to suggest that marriage is incompatible with a life of purity, devotion and service for Christ. Rather we are reminded that “marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4a). The record stands that “whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing” (Proverbs 18:22). The Preacher’s words can often be applied to marriage, “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9), particularly if the two are joined together in service for the Lord. The increased effectiveness of united action is suggested by Deuteronomy 32:30, where one chases a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.

And yet—although marriage is God’s will for the race in general, it is not necessarily His will for every individual. While it may be looked upon as an inalienable right, the disciple of the Lord Jesus may choose to forego that right in order to give himself more undistractedly to the service of Christ.

The Lord Jesus noted that in His kingdom there would be those who would become, as it were, eunuchs for His sake:

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matthew 19:12).

This is definitely a voluntary vow which a person takes as a result of two factors:

1. A sense of the guidance of God to be unmarried.
2. A desire to give himself more wholly to the work of the Lord without the added responsibilities of family life.

There must be the conviction of divine call (1 Corinthians 7:7b). Only by this can the disciple be assured that the Lord will give the needed grace for continence.

Secondly, it must be voluntary. Wherever celibacy is a matter of ecclesiastical compulsion, the danger of impurity and immorality is great.

The apostle Paul emphasized the fact that an unmarried person can often give himself more fully to the King’s business:

He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife (1 Corinthians 7:32, 33).

For that reason, he expressed the wish that the unmarried and widow should remain as he was, that is, unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:7, 8).

Even for those who were already married, the apostle insisted that the shortness of the time demanded that everything should be subordinated to the great task of making Christ known:

But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

This certainly does not mean that a man should repudiate his home responsibilities, abandon his wife and children, and sally forth as a missionary. But it does mean that he should not live for the pleasures and satisfactions of home life. He should not use his wife and children as excuses for giving Christ second place.

C. T. Studd was fearful that his fiancée might become so occupied with him that the Lord Jesus would not have first place in her life. To avoid this, he composed a verse for her to recite daily:

Jesus, I love Thee,
Thou art to me,
Dearer than Charlie
Ever could be.

The Communists have learned to subordinate family matters to the one great task of conquering mankind for their cause. Gordon Arnold Lonsdale is an example. After he was captured in England as a Russian spy in 1960, police found a letter from his wife and a six-page reply. His wife wrote, "How unjust is life. I fully understand you are working and this is your duty and you love your work and try to do all this very conscientiously. Nevertheless my reasoning is somehow narrow-minded in a female fashion, and I suffer dreadfully. Write to me how you love me, and maybe I will feel better."

Lonsdale replied, in part: "All I am going to say is that I myself have only one life and not an easy one at that. All I want is to spend my life so that looking at it, there will be no shame in looking back...I am 39 shortly; is there much left?"¹

"The time is short," wrote Paul, "it remaineth that...they that have wives be as though they had none..."

The tragedy is that hasty or misguided marriage has often been the devil's tool to sidetrack a young disciple from a pathway of maximum usefulness for Christ. Many aspiring pioneers have forfeited careers of undivided service for Him at the marriage altar.

Marriage may be a bitter enemy of fulfilling Christ's will that all should hear of Him. "Marriage is God-given. But when it becomes a barrier to God's will it is misused. We could name many—both men and women—who have had a definite call to the foreign field and never got there because associates held them back...Nothing—not even the God-given blessing of a life mate—must hinder God's purpose for one's life...Today souls die without Christ because loved ones have taken priority over God's will."²

It is perhaps especially true in the case of pioneer workers that a life of celibacy is preferable. "Men and women of the vanguard may need to deny themselves even the necessities of life to say nothing of its softer though perfectly legitimate pleasures. The duty of such is to endure hardness, to be good soldiers, unencumbered by the things of this life, athletes unentangled by any weight...It is a vocation, a calling, and an ordination to special service."³

For those who hear this call and answer, there is the preferred reward. "Believe me," said Jesus, "when I tell you that...every man who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or land for my sake will receive it all back many times over, and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:28, 29—Phillips).

Counting The Cost

The Lord Jesus never tried to coax men into a glib profession of faith. Neither did He seek to attract a large following by preaching a popular message.

In fact, whenever people began to swarm after Him, He would turn to them and sift them by setting forth the sternest terms of discipleship.

On one of these occasions, our Lord warned those who would follow Him that they should first count the cost. He said:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace (Luke 14:28-32).

Here He likened the Christian life to a building operation and to a war.

It is sheer folly to start building a tower, He said, unless you are sure you have enough funds to complete it. Otherwise, the unfinished structure will stand as a monument to your lack of foresight.

How true! It is one thing to make a decision for Christ in the warm emotion of a mass evangelistic rally. But it is quite another thing to deny one's self, and take up the cross daily, and follow Christ. Although it costs nothing to become a Christian, it costs plenty to be a consistent believer walking in a path of sacrifice, separation and suffering for Christ's sake. It is one thing to begin the Christian race well, but it is quite another thing to slug it out, day after day, through fair weather and foul, through prosperity and adversity, through joy and through grief.

A critical world is watching. By some strange instinct, it realizes that the Christian life deserves everything or nothing. When it sees an out-and-out Christian, it may sneer, and scoff and ridicule—yet inwardly, it has deep respect for the man who recklessly abandons himself to Christ. But when it sees a half-hearted Christian, it has nothing but contempt. It begins to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish. He made a big commotion when he was converted, but now he's very much like the rest of us. He started out at high speed, but now he's spinning his wheels."

And so the Savior said, "You had better count the cost!"

His second illustration concerned a king who was about to declare war on another. Would it not be sensible for him first to figure whether his 10,000 soldiers would be able to defeat the enemy's army amounting to twice that amount? How absurd it would be if he should declare war first, then reconsider when the armies were marching toward each other. The only thing left would be to hoist the white flag, and to send out a surrender team, abjectly crawling in the dust, and meekly asking for terms of peace.

It is no exaggeration to liken the Christian life to war. There are the fierce enemies—the world, the flesh and the devil. There are discouragements, bloodshed, and suffering. There are the long weary hours of vigil, and the yearning for the light of day. There are tears and toil and testings. And there is daily death.

Anyone who sets out to follow Christ should remember Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. And then he should count the cost. It is either an absolute commitment to Christ, or a sniveling surrender with all that that means of disgrace and degradation.

With these two illustrations, the Lord Jesus warned His hearers against any impulsive decisions to be His disciples. He could promise them persecution, tribulation and distress. They should first count the cost!

And what is the cost? The next verse answers the question:

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

The cost is "everything"—all a man has and is. It meant this for the Savior; it cannot mean less for those who will follow Him. If He Who was rich beyond all description voluntarily became poor, shall His disciples win the crown by some less costly means?

Then the Lord Jesus concluded His discourse with this summation:

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, therewith shall it be seasoned? (Luke 14:34)

In Bible times, it seems that people did not have pure salt, such as we have on our tables today. Their salt had

various impurities, such as sand, etc. It was somehow possible for the salt to lose its saltiness; the residue was insipid and worthless. It could not be used either as soil or fertilizer. At times it was used to make a footpath. Thus it was “good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matthew 5:13).

The application of the illustration is clear. There is one main purpose of the Christian’s existence—to glorify God by a life that is utterly poured out for Him. The Christian may lose his savor by laying up treasures on earth, by catering to his own comfort and pleasure, by trying to make a name for himself in the world, by prostituting his life and talents on the unworthy world.

If the believer misses the central goal of his existence, then he has missed everything. He is neither utilitarian nor ornamental. His fate is, like the savorless salt, to be trampled under foot of men—by their derision, and contempt and scorn.

The final words are these:

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Often when our Lord had uttered some hard saying, He added these words. It is as if He knew that all men would not receive them. He knew that some would try to explain them away, to dull the sharp edge of His cutting demands.

But He knew also that there would be open hearts, young and old, who would bow to His claims as being worthy of Himself.

So He left the door open! “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Those who hear are the ones who count the cost and still say:

I have decided to follow Jesus,
Tho’ no one joins me, still I will follow,
The world behind me, the Cross before me,
No turning back, no turning back.

William MacDonald:

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

First of all, it can do so by the godly lives of those who are associated with it. This is fundamental. God desires practical sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). This is why Church truths are not given as an isolated and distinct outline in any one section of the New Testament. Rather, they are found in many different places, and are interspersed with practical instruction for holy Christian living. The Lord does not simply want people who are outwardly correct in their church life, but those whose lives are testimonies to the truth.

To that end the local church should provide a good diet of Bible teaching. This instruction should not consist of mere snatches from here and there, but of consecutive, systematic teaching of the word of God. Only in this way will the saints receive all the Word, and in the balance in which God has given it.

Though sound and systematic teaching will have a definite preventative effect as far as sin in an assembly is concerned, inevitably every local church will be called upon to take disciplinary action at one time or another. Whenever sin comes in to affect the peace of the assembly or its testimony in the community, action must be taken. "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

REASONS FOR ACTING

Disciplinary action has two principal purposes: (1) To expose and expel from the fellowship professing Christians who are actually unregenerate -such people as are described in 1 John 2:19, (2) To deal with an erring believer in such a way as to bring about his restoration to the Lord and to the local church. Discipline of Christians is never an end in itself but always a means of effecting spiritual recovery.

DEGREES OF DISCIPLINE

Various degrees of discipline are described in the New Testament. In the case of a brother who sins against another, he should first be dealt with privately. If he will not listen, then one or two more persons should go to him. Failure to listen to this collective witness results in his being brought before the church. If this latter action should fail, then he is to be counted as an heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17).

Another form of discipline is a warning (1 Thessalonians 5:14). This is to be employed in the case of a brother who is unruly; that is, one who refuses to submit to those who are over him in the Lord.

Then we read that two classes of people are to be avoided: namely, a disorderly man (2 Thessalonians 3:11, 14, 15), and one who causes divisions (Romans 16:17). The disorderly person is one who refuses to work, while the other creates divisions among God's people in order to attract a following and profit materially.

An heretic should be rejected after the first and second warning (Titus 3:10). (There is some question as to whether this is a less severe form of discipline, or whether it amounts to excommunication.)

Then there is the extreme form of discipline - excommunication from the church (1 Corinthians 5:11, 13). This is reserved for a one or more. Is the local church to be deemed indifferent or supine because it refuses to act on the testimony of a solitary witness? Nay, it would be flying in the face of a divine command were it to do so.

"And be it remembered that this great practical principle is not confined in its application to cases of discipline or questions connected with an assembly of the Lord's people; it is of universal application. We should never allow ourselves to form a judgment or come to a conclusion without the divinely appointed measure of evidence; if that be not forthcoming, and if it be needful for us to judge in the case, God will, in due time, furnish the needed evidence. We have known a case in which a man was falsely accused because the accuser based his charge upon the evidence of one of his senses; had he taken the trouble of getting the evidence of one or two more of his senses, he would not have made the charge."

HOW TO ADMINISTER DISCIPLINE

Another aspect of this subject that deserves careful consideration is the manner in which the discipline is carried out. For example, it should be accomplished in the spirit of meekness, considering one's self, lest he also be tempted (Galatians 6:1). Also, it should be strictly impartial. The fact that a wrongdoer is related to us by ties of nature, for instance should in no wise influence our decision in the matter. Respect of persons must not be shown (Deuteronomy 1 :17; James 2:1).

In the case of excommunication, it should be the action of the church, and not of any one person (2 Corinthians 2:6). We refer once again to C. H. Mackintosh for the spirit in which this form of discipline should be effected. He says: "Nothing can be more solemn or affecting than the act of putting away a person from the Lord's table. It is the last sad and unavoidable act of the whole assembly, and it should be performed with broken hearts and weeping eyes. Alas how often it is otherwise! How often does this most solemn and holy duty take the form of a mere official announcement that such a person is out of fellowship. Need we wonder that discipline, so carried out, fails to tell with power upon the erring one, or upon the church.

"How then should the discipline be carried out? Just as 1 Corinthians 5 directs. When the case is so patent, so clear, that all discussion and all deliberation is at an end, the whole church should be solemnly convened for the special purpose-for, most assuredly, it is of sufficient gravity and importance to command a special meeting. All should, if possible, attend, and seek grace to make the sin their own, to go down before God in true self-judgment, and 'eat the sin-offering.' The church is not called to deliberate or discuss. The case should be thoroughly investigated, and all the facts collected by those who care for the interests of Christ and His church; and when it is thoroughly settled, and the evidence perfectly conclusive, then the whole church is called to perform, in deep sorrow and humiliation, the sad act of putting away from among themselves the evil doer. It is an act of holy obedience to the Lord's command."

Finally it should not need emphasis that Christians should not broadcast the sin of their fellows, but rather throw a kindly cloak of secrecy around the sin and its discipline, as far as outsiders are concerned.

CONCLUSION

Only as the church takes resolute action when sin is discovered can it hope to maintain its true character as a miniature of the holy temple of God.

Perhaps it should be added here that the New Testament assumes every believer to be attached to some local church; otherwise he would be free from the discipline of any assembly, and such a freedom would be fraught with the gravest perils for the individual.

Doing All For the Glory of God

William MacDonald:

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31)

One of the great tests of Christian behavior is whether there is any glory for God in it. Too often we test our conduct by the question, “Is there any harm in it?” But that is not the question. What we must ask is this: “Is there any glory for God in it?”

Before engaging in any activity, we should be able to bow our head and ask the Lord to glorify Himself in what we are about to do. If God cannot be honored by it, then we should refrain from doing it.

Other religions might be satisfied with behavior that has the absence of harm in it. Christianity moves beyond the merely negative to the distinctly positive. Therefore, as Keith L. Brooks said, “If you would be a successful Christian, stop hunting for the harm there is in things, and start looking for the good. If you want your life to be happy, cast your lot among those persons who are asking for the ‘good’ and not the ‘harm’ there is in it.”

Things might be harmless in themselves and yet be a dead weight in the Christian race. There is no law against an Olympic runner’s toting a sack of potatoes in the 1500 meter race. He can carry the spuds but he can’t win the race. So it is with the Christian. Things may be harmless and yet be a hindrance.

But usually when we ask “Is there any harm in it?” our question betrays a hidden doubt. We don’t ask that about activities that are legitimate on the face of them—such as prayer, Bible study, worship, witness and our daily work.

Incidentally, any honorable work can be done to the glory of God. That is why some housewives have this motto over their kitchen sink: “Divine services conducted here three times daily.”

Whenever in doubt, we could follow this advice from John Wesley’s mother; “If you wish to determine the lawfulness of a pleasure, follow this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes away the relish of spiritual things; whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin.”

Early Christians Undergoing Persecution

William MacDonald:

“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.” (Acts 4:29)

When the early Christians were undergoing persecution, they did not wait for their circumstances to change. Instead they glorified God in the circumstances.

Too often we fail to follow their example. We postpone action until conditions are more favorable. We see roadblocks as hindrances rather than as stepping-stones. We excuse our copping-out on the ground that our circumstances are not ideal.

The student remains uninvolved in Christian service until he graduates. Then he is preoccupied with romance and marriage. After that the pressures of employment and family life keep him from throwing himself into the work. He decides to wait for retirement; then he will be free to give the rest of his life to the Lord. By the time he retires his energy and vision are gone and he succumbs to a life of leisure.

Or it may be that we find ourselves having to work with people who rub us the wrong way. Perhaps these people have positions of leadership in the local church. Though they are faithful and hardworking, we find them objectionable. So what do we do? We sulk on the sidelines, waiting for a few first-class funerals. But it doesn't work. People like that always have surprising longevity. Waiting for funerals is unproductive.

Joseph didn't wait to get out of prison to make his life count; he had a ministry for God in prison. Daniel became a power for God during the Babylonian captivity. If he had waited till the exile was over it would have been too late. It was during Paul's imprisonment that he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. He didn't wait for his circumstances to improve.

The simple fact is that circumstances are never ideal in this life. And for the Christian, there is no promise that they are going to improve. So in service, as in salvation, now is the accepted time.

Luther said, “He who desires to wait until the occasion seems completely favorable for his work will never find it.” And Solomon warned that “he who watches the wind will not sow, and he who looks at the clouds will not reap” (Eccl. 11:4 NASB).

William MacDonald:

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." Matthew 4:23

A recurring problem among Christians is maintaining the proper balance between evangelism and social involvement. Evangelicals are often criticized for being too concerned with people's souls and not enough with their bodies. In other words, they don't spend enough time feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick and educating the illiterate.

To say anything against any of these ministries would be like criticizing motherhood. The Lord Jesus certainly was concerned with man's physical needs, and He taught His disciples to be concerned also. Historically, Christians have always been out in front in compassionate causes.

But as in so many other areas of life, it is a question of priorities. Which is more important, the temporal or the eternal? Judged on this basis, the Gospel is the main thing. Jesus intimated this when He said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe..." Doctrine comes before social involvement.

Some of man's most pressing social problems are the result of false religion. For example, there are people dying of starvation who won't kill a cow because they believe a relative may be reincarnated in the cow. When other nations send enormous shipments of grain, the rats eat more of it than the people, because no one will kill the rats. These people are shackled by false religion and Christ is the answer to their problems.

In trying to strike the proper balance between evangelism and social service, there is always the danger of becoming so occupied with "coffee and doughnuts" that the Gospel is crowded out. The history of Christian institutions is filled with such examples where the good has become the enemy of the best.

Certain forms of social involvement are questionable if not altogether "out." The Christian should never participate in revolutionary attempts to overthrow the government. It is doubtful that he should resort to political processes to right social injustices. Neither the Lord nor the apostles did. More can be accomplished through the spread of the Gospel than through legislation.

The Christian who forsakes all to follow Christ, who sells all to give to the poor, who opens his heart and pocketbook whenever he sees a genuine case of need, need not have a guilty conscience over social unconcern.

William MacDonald:

GIFTS FOR TODAY

It was mentioned earlier that originally there were five gifts-apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. It was suggested that the first two were concerned primarily with the foundation of the Church, and that, in general, the need for them passed when the complete Word of God was given in written form.

That means that we have three gifts today-evangelists, pastors, and teachers. However, the probability is that the "pastor-teacher" gift is just one gift, in which case only two of the gifts would be operative today. We turn now to the purpose of the gifts and how they function.

WHY GIFTS ARE GIVEN

The purpose of the gifts is set forth in Ephesians 4:12, 13. "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Now upon first reading this verse in our King James Version of the Bible, one would think that these are three separate reasons why the gifts were given: namely (1) for the perfecting of the saints, (2) for the work of the ministry, (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ. However, is this what the passage teaches? A study of other versions reveals that it is not.

The Revised Version, for instance, indicates that in the second and third instances of the use of the word "for" the word is better translated "unto." The verse then reads, "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering unto the building up of the body of Christ." This then reveals not three reasons why the gifts were given, but rather one reason alone-to build up the saints in the faith, so that they in turn can do the work of ministering (or serving), so that the body of Christ will be built up numerically and spiritually. It is the saints who are to do the work of ministering.

THE TRUTH ILLUSTRATED

We might illustrate this truth by a diagram (Figure 1). The circle in the center depicts, let us say, the gift of a teacher. He ministers to those in the circle around him, so that they become perfected (that is, built up in the faith), and they then go forth to minister to others. In this way the church grows and expands. It is the divine method of reaching the greatest number of people in the shortest possible time.

According to this divine pattern, the evangelists and pastors and teachers always have in view the idea of reaching, training, and equipping others to do the work of ministering.

Although not every Christian has the gift of an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher, yet every one is expected to engage in Christian service. Every member of the Church should be a worshipper, a soul winner, a Bible student, a propagator of the faith.

This important obligation is further stressed in 2 Timothy 2:2. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Once again this can be illustrated by a diagram (Figure 2).

Now this plan produces benefits that are apparent at once. It results in a rapid expansion of the Christian faith. Individual Christians become mature through exercising their God-given functions. By thus becoming mature, they are less susceptible to the teachings of the false cults so current in the world today. And the Church thus expanding and maturing gives a more accurate representation of the body of Christ upon earth.

THE SYSTEM COMMON TO CHRISTENDOM

Contrast with this, the system which is so common in Christendom today. One man is selected as minister of a

church. He preaches the sermons, baptizes the converts, conducts the communion service, and otherwise generally performs most of the religious duties of the congregation. The people listen to the sermons faithfully week after week, but in an unfortunately large number of cases, would be quite unwilling to assume any active participation, reasoning that they are paying someone else to do this for them. Too often they become, in short, sermon-tasters, with little real personal acquaintance with the truths of God's Word. And the ever-present danger is that these people, reared in an evangelical environment, remain mere "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14).

The present system we are speaking about may be illustrated in Figure 3.

Here the minister has his congregation and they dutifully attend the services; but having done so, they go back to their occupations, with little or no personal responsibility to do anything about what they have heard. Obviously what one minister can do in such a situation is very limited. On the other hand, if all or most of those people were active for the Lord, the progress would be remarkable.

It was such considerations that caused Alexander Maclaren to write: "I cannot but believe that the present practice of confining the public teaching of the church to an official class has done harm. Why should one man be for ever speaking, and hundreds of people who are able to teach, sitting dumb to listen or pretend to listen to him? I hate forcible revolution, and do not believe that any institutions, either political or ecclesiastical, which need violence to sweep them away, are ready to be removed; but I believe that if the level of spiritual life were raised among us, new forms would naturally be evolved, in which there should be a more adequate recognition of the great principle on which the democracy of Christianity is founded: namely, 'I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh-and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in these days of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy.'

THE CLERICAL SYSTEM EXAMINED

This discussion of one-man ministry brings to the front the questions, "What about the clerical system? Is it scriptural? We shall now seek an answer to these pertinent queries.

By the clergy we mean a separate class of men humanly ordained to the service of God, and, in addition to preaching and teaching, usually given sole authority to perform the rites and ordinances of the church.

At the outset we would gladly recognize that many men who have held the clerical position have been outstanding servants of Christ and have been wonderfully used of Him. To many of them and their ministry, both oral and written, we owe a profound debt of gratitude which we gladly acknowledge. All such believers in the Lord Jesus, we readily embrace as our brethren.

But we must face honestly and squarely the fact that the idea of a clergyman is not found in the New Testament. Nowhere does one find one man in charge of a church. (At the end of the epistle to Titus, the subscription says, "It was written to Titus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, from Nicopolis of Macedonia." However, no one contends that this footnote was part of the original text. It was added by the translators, who, of course, were biased in favor of clericalism. The Revised Version omits the note altogether.)

WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT SAY?

Not only is the idea of the clergy unsupported by the New Testament, but, we believe, it is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament.

First of all, it violates the principle of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9). In the Old Testament, there was a separate caste of men standing between God and the people. In Christianity, all believers are priests, with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with priesthood. In practice, the idea of a one-man ministry effectively silences the worship and hinders the service of Christian priests.

Secondly, the clerical system often prohibits the free exercise of gifts in the church (1 Corinthians 12 and 14), by arbitrarily limiting ministry to one person or an official group of persons.

Again, it often confines the administration of the ordinances to a priestly caste, whereas Scripture makes no

such distinction.

The principle of salaried ministry, which almost invariably accompanies the clerical system, inevitably involves responsibility to some higher person or persons. This higher authority may exert pressure on a minister by imposing artificial and unspiritual standards of attainment. For instance, it is common to judge a man's effectiveness by the number of persons added to the church roll during the year. Not only is this not a true measure of effective ministry, but it creates the strong temptation to lower the standards of reception in order to make a better showing. The servant of Christ should not thus be bound, fettered, and hampered. He should ever be the Lord's free man (Galatians 1:10).

Clerisy caters to the ever present danger of gathering people to a man instead of to the Name of the Lord. If a man is the attracting power in a local church, then the attraction is gone when the man leaves. If on the other hand the saints gather because the Lord is there, then they will be faithful because of Him.

In practice, if not in theory, the clergy has served to obscure effectively the truth of the headship of Christ (Ephesians 1:72), and in some cases to deny it completely.

If it be contended that the bishops of the New Testament are the same as the clergy of today, we would reply that the New Testament contemplates several bishops in one church (Philippians 1:1), and not one bishop presiding over a church or a group of churches.

It is undeniable that many men in the clerical position are gifted servants of Christ to the Church. However, they did not become gifts by human appointment or ordination but by the work of the Lord Jesus Himself. They are responsible to so minister that the saints will be built up for active service, and not so that the saints will become perpetually dependent on them.

The evils that have flowed from human ordination of men who were not called of God are manifest and need no elaboration here.

Finally where one man is primarily responsible for the teaching ministry of the church, there is no system of checks and balances, and thus there is a danger of one-sided interpretations, if not of evil doctrine itself. Where the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, has liberty to speak through various gifts in the church, more facets of the truth are brought to light, and there is greater immunity from error where all the saints are assiduously comparing Scripture with Scripture.

CONCLUSION

Thus, though much blessing has often flowed from the ministry of men representing the clerical system, we believe that it is not only not God's best but that it is seriously detrimental to the best interests of the Church.

God's way is for the gifts to minister to the saints, then for the saints in turn to go forth to do the work of the ministry. The local assembly should recognize this important principle, and do nothing to hinder its free development. As the saints thus minister, unbelievers will be saved, saints will be edified, and new assemblies will be brought into being.

Faith Is Trusting the Word of God

William MacDonald:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

Faith is implicit trust in the Word of God. It is confidence in the trustworthiness of God. It is the conviction that what God says is true and that what He promises will come to pass. It deals primarily in the realm of the future (“things hoped for”) and the realm of the invisible (“things not seen”).

Whittier said that “the steps of faith fall on the seeming void, and find the rock beneath.” But not so! Faith is no leap in the dark. It demands the surest evidence, and finds that evidence in the Word of God.

Some people have the misconception that if you just believe a thing strongly enough it will come to pass. But that is credulity, not faith. Faith must have some revelation of God to lean on, some promise of God to cling to. If God promises something, then it is as sure as if it had already happened. If He foretells the future, then it is certain to be fulfilled. In other words, faith brings the future within the present and makes the invisible seen.

There is no risk in believing God. God cannot lie, He would not deceive, and He cannot be deceived. To believe God is the most rational, sane, logical thing a person can do. What is more reasonable than that the creature should believe the Creator?

Faith is not limited to possibilities but invades the realm of the impossible. Someone has said, “Faith begins where possibilities end. If it’s possible then there’s no glory for God in it. If it’s impossible, it can be done.”

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees
And looks to God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, “It shall be done.”

Admittedly there are difficulties and problems in the life of faith. God tests our faith in the crucible of trial and affliction to see if it is genuine (1 Pet. 1:7). We often have to wait long years to see the fulfilment of His promises, and sometimes we have to wait till we reach the other side. But “difficulties are food for faith to feed on” (George Muller).

“Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). When we refuse to believe Him, we are saying that He is a liar (1 John 5:10), and how can God be pleased by people who call Him a liar?

William MacDonald:

There can be no true discipleship without profound and unquestioning faith in the living God. He who would do exploits for God must first trust Him implicitly. "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them"—Hudson Taylor.

Now true faith is always based upon some promise of God, some portion of His Word. This is important. The believer first reads or hears some promise of the Lord. The Holy Spirit takes that promise and applies it to his heart and conscience in a very personal way. The Christian becomes aware that God has spoken to him directly. With utter confidence in the trustworthiness of the One Who has promised, he reckons the promise as sure as if it were already fulfilled, even though, humanly speaking, it is impossible.

Or perhaps it is a commandment rather than a promise. To faith, there is no difference. If God commands, He enables. If He bids Peter to walk on the water, Peter can be sure that the needed power will be given (Matthew 14:28). If He commands us to preach the gospel to every creature, we can be sure of the needed grace (Mark 16:15).

Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends. "The province of faith begins where probabilities cease and where sight and sense fail"—George Muller.

Faith says, "If 'impossible' is the only objection, it can be done!"

"Faith brings God into the scene, and therefore it knows absolutely nothing of difficulties—yea, it laughs at impossibilities. In the judgment of faith, God is the grand answer to every question—the grand solution of every difficulty. It refers all to Him; and hence it matters not in the least to faith whether it be six hundred thousand (dollars) or six hundred million; it knows that God is all-sufficient. It finds all its resources in Him. Unbelief says, 'How can such and such things be?' It is full of 'Hows'; but faith has one great answer to ten thousand 'hows,' and that answer is, God"—C. H. Mackintosh.

Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child. But God had promised, and to Abraham there was only one impossibility—that God could lie.

(He) against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, "So shall thy seed be." And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform (Romans 4:18-21).

Faith, mighty faith the promise sees
And looks to God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, "It shall be done!"

Our God is the God Who specializes in impossibilities (Luke 1:37). There is nothing too hard for Him (Genesis 18:14). "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Faith claims His promise, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23), and exults with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Doubt sees the obstacles—
Faith sees the way!
Doubt sees the darkest night—
Faith sees the day!
Doubt dreads to take a step—
Faith soars on high,
Doubt questions, "Who believes?"
Faith answers, "I!"

Because faith deals with the supernatural and the divine, it does not always seem to be "reasonable." It was

not using “common sense” for Abraham to go out, not knowing where he was going, but simply obeying God’s command (Hebrews 11:8). It was not “shrewd” of Joshua to attack Jericho without death-dealing weapons (Joshua 6:1-20). Men of the world would scoff at such “insanity.” But it worked!

Actually, faith is most reasonable. What is more reasonable than that a creature should trust his Creator? Is it insane to believe in One Who can neither lie nor fail nor err? To trust God is the most sensible, sane, rational thing that a man can do. It is no leap in the dark. Faith demands the surest evidence and finds it in God’s unfailing Word. No one has ever trusted Him in vain; no one ever will. Faith in the Lord involves no risk whatever.

Faith truly glorifies God; it gives Him His proper place as the One Who is completely trustworthy. On the other hand, unbelief dishonors God; it charges Him with lying (1 John 5:10). It limits the Holy One of Israel (Psalm 78:41).

Faith gives man his proper place also—as a humble suppliant, bowed in the dust before the sovereign Lord of all.

Faith is opposed to sight. Paul reminded us that “we walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). To walk by sight means to have visible means of support, to have adequate reserves for the future, to employ human cleverness in insuring against unseen risks. The walk of faith is the very opposite; it is a moment by moment reliance on God alone. It is a perpetual crisis of dependence on the Lord. The flesh shrinks from a position of complete dependence on an unseen God. It seeks to provide a cushion against possible losses. If it cannot see where it is going, it is apt to suffer complete nervous collapse. But faith steps forward in obedience to the Word of God, rises above circumstances, and trusts the Lord for the supply of all needs.

Any disciple who determines to walk by faith can be sure that his faith will be tested. Sooner or later, he will be brought to the end of his human resources. In his extremity, he will be tempted to appeal to his fellow men. If he is really trusting the Lord, he will look to God alone.

“To make known my wants, directly or indirectly, to a human being, is departure from the life of faith, and a positive dishonor to God. It is actually betraying Him. It is tantamount to saying that God has failed me, and I must look to my fellow for help. It is forsaking the living fountain and turning to a broken cistern. It is placing the creature between my soul and God, thus robbing my soul of rich blessing, and God of the glory due to Him”—C. H. Mackintosh.

The normal attitude of a disciple is to desire an increase in his faith (Luke 17:5). He has already trusted Christ for salvation. Now he seeks to extend the areas of his life which are submitted to the Lord’s control. As he faces sickness, trials, tragedies, and bereavements, he comes to know God in a new and more intimate way, and his faith is strengthened. He proves the truth of the promise, “Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord” (Hosea 6:3). The more he finds God to be trustworthy, the more anxious he is to trust Him for greater things.

Since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, the disciple’s desire should be to saturate himself in the Scriptures—to read them, study them, memorize them, meditate upon them day and night. They are his chart and compass, his guide and comfort, his lamp and light.

In the life of faith, there is always room for advancement. When we read of what has been accomplished through faith, we realize that we are like little children, playing at the edge of a boundless ocean. The exploits of faith are given in Hebrews 11. They rise to a magnificent crescendo in verses 32-40:

And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy): they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Faith

One final word! We have already mentioned that a disciple who walks by faith will doubtless be considered a dreamer or a fanatic by men of the world or even by other Christians. But it is good to remember that “the faith that enables one to ‘walk with God’ enables him also to attach the proper values to the thoughts of men”—C. H. Mackintosh.

Forgiving A Person in Your Heart

William MacDonald:

“And be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32 NASB)

There is a definite order to be followed in connection with Scriptural forgiveness. If we would follow this order we would save ourselves a lot of headaches and heartaches.

The first thing to do when you have been wronged is to forgive that person in your heart. You don’t tell him yet that he has been forgiven, but by forgiving him in your heart, you leave the matter between the Lord and him. This prevents your gastric juices from turning into sulphuric acid, and saves you from other horrible physical and emotional disorders.

Next you go to the brother and rebuke him (Lu. 17:3). Instead of blabbing to others about how you have been wronged, “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Mt. 18:15). Try to contain the problem as much as possible, that is, try to keep it as private as you can.

If he does not confess and ask forgiveness, then go to him with one or two witnesses (Mt. 18:16). This provides adequate Scriptural testimony as to the offender’s attitude.

If he is still unbending, then you take the matter to the assembly, accompanied by the witnesses. If he refuses to listen to the judgment of the assembly, then, of course, he is dis-fellowshipped (Matt. 18:17).

But if at any point during this process, he repents, then you forgive him (Lu. 17:3). You have already forgiven him in your heart, but now you administer forgiveness to him. Here it is important not to gloss over the matter. Don’t say “Oh that’s alright. You really didn’t do anything wrong.” Rather say, “I very gladly forgive you. Now the whole matter is closed. Let’s get down and pray together.”

The shame of having to confess and repent may deter him from wronging you again. But even if he repeats his sin and then repents, you must forgive him. Even if he does it seven times in one day and repents seven times, you must forgive him—whether you think he’s sincere or not (Lu. 17:4).

We must never forget that we have been forgiven millions. We must not hesitate to forgive others for what amounts to a few dollars, figuratively speaking (Mt. 18:23-35).

Forsaking All

William MacDonald:

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

To be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, one must forsake all. This is the unmistakable meaning of the words of the Savior. No matter how much we might object to such an “extreme” demand, no matter how much we might rebel against such an “impossible” and “unwise” policy, the fact remains that this is the Word of the Lord, and He means what He says.

At the outset, we should face these unbending truths:

1. Jesus did not make this demand of a certain, select class of Christian workers. He said, “Whosoever he be of you...”
2. He did not say that we must simply be willing to forsake all. He said, “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not...”
3. He did not say that we must forsake only a part of our wealth. He said, “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath...”
4. He did not say that a diluted form of discipleship would be possible for the man who holds on to his treasures. Jesus said, “...he cannot be my disciple.”

Actually, we should not be surprised at this absolute demand, as if it were the only such suggestion in the Bible.

Did Jesus not say:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” (Matthew 6:19, 20)?

As Wesley justly said, “To lay up treasure on earth is as plainly forbidden by our Master as adultery and murder.”

Did Jesus not say:

“Sell that ye have, and give alms...” (Luke 12:33)?

Did He not instruct the rich young ruler:

“...sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me” (Luke 18:22)?

If He did not mean exactly what He said, what then did He mean?

Was it not true of the believers in the early church that they “sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:45)?

And has it not been true of many of God’s saints down through the years that they literally forsook all to follow Jesus?

Anthony Norris Groves and his wife, early missionaries to Baghdad, became convinced that “they must cease to lay up treasure on earth, and that they should devote the whole of a very substantial income...to the Lord’s service.”¹ Groves’ convictions on this subject are set forth in his booklet, **CHRISTIAN DEVOTEDNESS**.²

C. T. Studd “decided to give his entire fortune to Christ, and to take the golden opportunity offered him of doing what the rich young man had failed to do....It was simple obedience to the black and white statements of God’s Word.”³ After distributing thousands to the work of the Lord, he reserved the equivalent of \$9,588

for his new bride. She was not to be outdone by her husband. “Charlie,” she asked, “what did the Lord tell the rich young man to do?”

“Sell all,” he replied.

“Well then, we will start clear with the Lord at our wedding.” And off went the money to Christian missions.

The same spirit of devotedness animated Jim Elliot. He wrote in his diary:

“Father, let me be weak that I might lose my clutch on everything temporal. My life, my reputation, my possessions, Lord, let me loose the tension of the grasping hand. Even, Father, would I lose the love of fondling. How often I have released a grasp only to retain what I prized by ‘harmless’ longing, the fondling touch. Rather, open my hand to receive the nail of Calvary, as Christ’s was opened—that I, releasing all, might be released, unleashed from all that binds me now. He thought Heaven, yea, equality with God, not a thing to be clutched at. So let me release my grasp.”

Our infidel hearts tell us that it would be impossible to take the words of the Lord literally. If we forsook all, we would starve. After all, we must make provision for our own future and the future of our loved ones. If every Christian forsook all, then who would finance the work of the Lord? And if there were not some Christians who were wealthy, then how could the higher class of people ever be reached with the gospel? And so the arguments come pouring forth in quick succession—all to prove that the Lord Jesus could not have meant what He said.

The fact of the matter is that obedience to the Lord’s command is the most sane and reasonable life and the one that yields the greatest joy. The witness of Scripture and of experience testifies that no one who lives sacrificially for Christ will ever suffer want. When a man obeys God, the Lord takes care of him.

The man who forsakes all to follow Christ is not a shiftless pauper who expects to be supported by his fellow Christians.

1. He is industrious. He works diligently for the supply of his current necessities and those of his family.
2. He is frugal. He lives as economically as possible so that everything above immediate needs can be put into the Lord’s work.
3. He is foresighted. Instead of accumulating wealth on earth, he lays up his treasures in heaven.
4. He trusts God for the future. Instead of giving the best of his life to the building up of vast reserves for old-age security, he gives his best to the service of Christ and trusts Him for the future. He believes that if he seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, he will never lack food and clothing (Matthew 6:33).

To him, it is unreasonable to accumulate wealth for a rainy day. He would argue as follows:

1. How can we conscientiously hoard extra funds when the money could be used right now for the salvation of souls? “...whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“Again, consider the important command—Love thy neighbor as thyself (Leviticus 19:18). Can we, with any truth, be said to love that neighbor as ourselves, whom we allow to starve, when we have enough and to spare? May I not appeal to any who have experienced the joy of knowing the unspeakable gift of God, and ask—‘Would you exchange this knowledge...for a hundred worlds?’ Let us not then withhold the means by which others may obtain this sanctifying knowledge and heavenly consolation”—A. N. Groves.

2. If we really believe that Christ’s coming is imminent, we will want to put our money to use immediately. Otherwise we run the risk of having it fall into the devil’s hands—money that could have been used for eternal blessing.

3. How can we conscientiously pray to the Lord to provide finances for Christian work when we ourselves have money that we are not willing to use for this purpose? Forsaking all for Christ saves us from hypocrisy in prayer.

4. How can we teach the whole counsel of God to others if there are areas of truth, such as this, which we have failed to obey? Our lives in such a case would seal our lips.

5. Clever men of the world set aside abundant reserves for the future. This is not walking by faith but by sight. The Christian is called to a life of dependence on God. If he lays up treasures on earth, how is he different from the world and its ways?

The argument is frequently heard that we must provide for the future needs of our families; otherwise we are worse than infidels. The following two verses are used to support this view:

“...the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children (2 Corinthians 12:13).

But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8).

A careful study of these verses will show that they deal with CURRENT NECESSITIES and not with FUTURE CONTINGENCIES.

In the first verse, Paul is using irony. He is the parent, and the Corinthian’s are his children. He did not burden them financially, although he had every right to do so as a servant of the Lord. After all, he was their father in the faith, and parents ordinarily provide for their children, not vice versa. It is not at all a question of parents’ laying up for their children’s future. The whole passage has to do with the supply of Paul’s present needs, not his possible future necessities.

In 1 Timothy 5:8, the apostle is discussing the care of poor widows. He insists that their relatives are responsible to care for them. If there are no relatives or if they fail in their responsibility, then the local church should care for Christian widows. But here again the subject is present needs, not future necessities.

God’s ideal is that the members of the body of Christ should care for the immediate needs of their fellow believers:

“It is a matter of share and share alike. At present your plenty should supply their need, and then at some future date their plenty may supply your need. In that way we share with each other, as the Scripture says, He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack” (2 Corinthians 8:15, Phillips).

A Christian who feels he must provide for future needs faces the difficult problem of knowing how much will be enough. He therefore spends his life in pursuit of a fortune of some indefinite amount and forfeits the privilege of giving his best to the Lord Jesus Christ. He gets to the end of a wasted life and finds out that all his needs would have been provided anyway, if he had just lived wholeheartedly for the Savior.

If all Christians took the words of the Lord Jesus literally, there would be no lack of finances in the Lord’s work. The gospel would go out with increased power and in increased volume. If any particular disciple faced a need, it would be the joy and privilege of other disciples to share whatever they might have.

To suggest that there must be wealthy Christians to reach the wealthy people of the world is absurd. Paul reached Caesar’s household while he was a prisoner (Philippians 4:22). If we obey God, we can trust Him to arrange the details.

The example of the Lord Jesus should be conclusive in the matter. The servant is not above his Master. “It ill becomes the servant to seek to be rich, and great, and honored in this world where his Lord was poor, and mean, and despised”—George Muller.

“The sufferings of Christ included poverty, 2 Corinthians 8:9. Of course, poverty does not necessitate rags and dirt, but it does involve the lack of reserves and of the means to be luxurious...Some thirty years ago...Andrew Murray pointed out that the Lord and His apostles could not have accomplished the work they had to do had they not been actually poor. He who would lift up another must descend, like the Samaritan, and the infinite majority of mankind always have been and still are poor”—A. N. Groves.

People plead that there are certain material possessions that are necessary for home life. That is true.

People plead that Christian businessmen must have a certain amount of capital to carry on a business today.

That is true.

People plead that there are other material possessions, such as an automobile, which can be used for God's glory. That too is true.

But beyond these legitimate necessities, the Christian should live frugally and sacrificially for the spread of the gospel. His motto should be, "Labor hard, consume little, give much—and all to Christ," A. N. Groves.

Each of us stands responsible to God as to what it means to forsake all. One believer cannot legislate to another; each person must act as a result of his own exercise before the Lord. It is a tremendously personal matter.

If as a result of such exercise, the Lord should lead a believer to a degree of devotedness hitherto unknown, there is no room for personal pride. Any sacrifices we make are no sacrifices at all, when seen in the light of Calvary. Beside all this, we only give to the Lord what we cannot keep anyway and what we have ceased to love.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"—Jim Elliot.

Giving As Unto God

William MacDonald:

“But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” (Phil. 4:18)

Paul’s letter to the Philippians was really an acknowledgment of a gift which he had received from the believers at Philippi. We are probably safe in assuming that it was a gift of money. The surprising thing is the way in which the apostle magnifies the gift. He calls it “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” In Ephesians 5:2 He uses a similar expression to describe Christ’s great gift of Himself at Calvary. He speaks of it as “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” It is breathtaking to think that a gift given to a servant of the Lord should be memorialized with language similar to that which describes the Unspeakable Gift.

J. H. Jowett comments finely on this point. “How vast, then, is the range of an apparently local kindness! We thought we were ministering to a pauper, and in reality we were conversing with the King. We imagined that the fragrance would be shut up in a petty neighborhood, and lo, the sweet aroma steals through the universe. We thought that we were dealing only with Paul, and we find that we were ministering to Paul’s Savior and Lord.” When we understand the true spiritual nature of Christian giving and the vast range of its influence, we are delivered from giving grudgingly or of necessity. We are immune forever to the gimmickry of professional fund-raisers who extort by cajolery, pathos or comedy. We see that giving is a form of priestly service, not a legal enactment. We give because we love, and we love to give.

The truth that my minuscule gifts to the Great God fill the throne room of the universe with fragrance should inspire me to humble worship and hilarious giving. Never again will the offering on Sunday morning be a boring, if necessary, part of the service. It will be as truly a means of giving directly to the Lord Jesus as if He were bodily present.

God Will Do What Is Right in the End

William MacDonald:

“Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25)

When there are mysteries in life too deep for us to fathom, we can relax in the confidence that the Judge of all the earth is the God of absolute and infinite righteousness.

There is the question of the status of children who die before reaching the age of accountability. For many of us, it is enough to know that “of such is the kingdom of God.” We believe that they are safe through the blood of Jesus. But for others who are still not satisfied, the words of our verse should be sufficient. God can be counted on to do what is right.

There is the perennial problem of election and predestination. Does God choose some to salvation without at the same time choosing some to be damned? After the Calvinists and Arminians have all had their say, we can have full confidence that there is no unrighteousness with God.

Again there is the seeming injustice that the wicked often prosper while the righteous are passing through deep tribulation. There is the recurring question as to the fate of the heathen who have never heard the Gospel. Men puzzle over why God ever allowed sin to enter. We often stand dumb in the face of tragedies, of poverty and hunger, of horrible physical and mental impairments. Doubt continually murmurs, “If God is in control, why does He permit it all?”

Faith replies, “Wait till the last chapter is written. God hasn’t made His first mistake. When we are able to see things from a clearer perspective, we will realize that the Judge of all the earth has done right.”

God writes in characters too grand
For our short sight to understand;
We catch but broken strokes, and try
To fathom all the mystery
Of withered hopes, of death, of life,
The endless war, the useless strife,—
But there, with larger, clearer sight,
We shall see this—His way was right.

John Oxenham

God's Center of Worship

William MacDonald:

“...neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem.” (John 4:21)

For the Samaritans, the center of worship was on Mt. Gerizim. For the Jews, Jerusalem was the place on earth where God had placed His Name. But Jesus announced a new order to the woman of Samaria, “...the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

There is no longer a single place on earth which is designated for worship. In our dispensation, a Holy Person has taken the place of a holy site. The Lord Jesus Christ is now the gathering center of His people. Jacob’s words have found their fulfillment, “...unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10).

We gather to Him. We are not drawn together by a consecrated building with stained glass windows and organ music. We do not gather to a man, no matter how gifted or eloquent. The Lord Jesus is the divine magnet.

The place on earth is not important; we may meet in a chapel, a home, a field or a cave. In true worship, we enter by faith into the heavenly sanctuary. God the Father is there. The Lord Jesus is there. The angels are there in festal array. The saints of the Old Testament period are there. And the saints of the Church age who have died are there. And in such august company we are privileged to pour out our hearts in worship to God through the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. So while our bodies are still on earth, in spirit we pass “far, far above the restless world that wars below.”

Does this contradict the Savior’s words, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20)? No, this is also true. He is present in a special way when His people meet together in His Name. He takes our prayers and praises and presents them to the Father. What a privilege to have the Lord Jesus in our midst.

William MacDonald:

“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” (Heb. 13:13)

We learn first from this verse that Christ is the gathering center for His people. We don’t gather to a denomination, a church, a building or a great preacher but Christ alone. “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10). “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psa. 50:5).

A second lesson is that we must go to Him outside the camp. The camp here has been defined as “the whole earthly religious system adapted to the natural man.” It is the religious sphere in which Christ is dishonored or downgraded. It is the pagan monstrosity that masquerades today as Christianity, “having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.” Christ is outside, and we must go out to Him.

We also learn that meeting to Christ alone outside the camp involves reproach. It seldom occurs to Christians that there is reproach connected with obedience to the Lord in the matter of church fellowship. More often church associations carry a measure of prestige and status. But the closer we get to the New Testament ideal, the more likely it is that we will have to share His reproach. Are we willing to pay that price?

He called me out, the Man with garments dyed,
I knew His voice—my Lord, the crucified;
He showed Himself, and oh, I could not stay,
I had to follow Him—had to obey.

It cast me out—this world when once it found
That I within this rebel heart had crowned
The Man it had rejected, spurned and slain,
Whom God in wondrous power had raised to reign.

And so we are without the camp, my Lord and I,
But oh, His presence sweeter is than any earthly tie
Which once I counted greater than His claim;
I’m out, not only from the world, but to His Name.

Selected

William MacDonald:

THERE IS ONE BODY

According to Ephesians 4:4 there is only one Church. In spite of all the circumstances that seem to deny it, the fact remains that as far as God is concerned, there is only one body of believers on the earth today. Although this Church is never visible to man in its entirety, yet it is formed into a common body by the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY

By using the analogy of the human body (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18), Paul teaches us that Christ as Head in heaven controls His body on earth. The head speaks of authority, leadership, and the seat of the intellect. The head and the body share the same life, interests and prospects. As the head is not complete without the body, so, in a sense, Christ is not "complete" without His Church. Thus we read in Ephesians 1:23 that the Church, as His body, "is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." This is cause for deepest awe and worship in the believer.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE MEMBERS OF THE BODY

The moment a person is saved, he is added to the Church as a member of the body (Acts 2:47). This membership transcends the bounds of race, color, nationality, temperament, culture, social caste, language and denomination.

In his classic passage on the members of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26), Paul reminds us that there are many members in the body (vv. 12-14). Every member has a function to perform (vv. 15-17). However, not all members have the same function (v. 19). The welfare of the body depends on all the members working together (vv. 21-23). Because all the members of the body need each other, there is no cause for envy or discontent, on the one hand (vv. 15-17); or for pride and independence on the other (v. 21). Because all are members of the one body, there should be mutual care, sympathy, and joy (vv. 23-26).

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH

After He ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be His Representative on the earth (John 14:16,26). The Spirit's activities in the Church may be seen in part from the fact that He leads Christians in their worship (Ephesians 2:18); He inspires their prayers (Romans 8:26, 27); He empowers their preaching (1 Thessalonians 1:5); He guides them in their activities, both positively (Acts 13:2), and negatively (Acts 16:6, 7); He raises up overseers for the church (Acts 20:28); He bestows gifts for its growth and effectiveness (Ephesians 4:11) and He guides believers into all truth (John 16:13).

THE CHURCH OF GOD IS HOLY

God is calling out of the nations a people for His name. He sets them apart to Himself from the sinful world and calls upon them to respond with lives of practical holiness (1 Corinthians 3:17). Only in this way can the Church faithfully represent a holy God in this corrupt scene.

GIFTS ARE GIVEN FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

It is the Lord's will that the Church should grow both spiritually and numerically. To that end the risen Christ gives gifts to the Church (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts are men who are given special ability to build up the Church. As listed in Ephesians 4:11, the gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. (see note 1).

We believe that the apostles and prophets were concerned primarily with the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). The need for these apostles and New Testament prophets passed when the foundation was laid, and we no longer have them, in the primary sense of the terms.(see note 2)

However, we still do have evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The evangelists go out to the world with the Gospel, bring sinners to Christ, and then lead them into the fellowship of the local church. Pastors take a shepherd-care of the flock, nourishing the sheep, encouraging them, and guarding them from evil. The teachers unfold the Word of God in an understandable way, and present the doctrines of the Scriptures in a well-balanced manner. However, the probability is that the "pastor-teacher" gift is one gift as the care of the flock would include teaching the Word of God.

As these gifts minister, the Church grows and the saints are built up in their most holy faith. Gifts are God's provision for the expansion of the Church.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE PRIESTS OF GOD

A final truth which we will mention in connection with the Church is the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9). In the old Testament, only a certain group of men were eligible for the priesthood-the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron (Exodus 28:1). Today there is no special caste of priests, separate from their fellows, with distinctive garb and peculiar privileges. All children of God are priests of God with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with such a name.

THE COMPLETION AND DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

As has already been noted, the Church is now in the process of construction. Every time a soul is saved, a living stone is added to the building. The edifice is rising silently without sound of hammer. The Holy Spirit adds daily to the Church such as should be saved (Acts 2: 47).

One day soon, the work will be finished. The last stone will be added, and the Lord Jesus will descend into the air. As if drawn by a divine magnet, the Church will rise to meet the Savior, and together they both will return to the many mansions of the Father's house. And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

It will be the Church's blessed portion not only to be with Christ forever, but also to share the glories which He won during His earthly career (John 17:22).

Throughout eternity the Church is destined to be an eternal witness to the glory of God. "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

In the meantime, the Church is God's masterpiece on the earth-an object lesson to principalities and powers in heavenly places of the manifold wisdom of God. Every believer should therefore be vitally interested in the Church, and his Christian service should have the expansion and edification of the Church as one of its primary aims.

NOTES (1)

In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, another list of spiritual gifts is given: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. There is no necessary contradiction between the two lists. In Ephesians 4, the gifts are persons whose whole career, apparently, is given over to evangelism, teaching, or pastoral work. In 1 Corinthians 12, the gifts are endowments or abilities which are not necessarily limited to certain individuals but which the Holy Spirit may give to any member of the Body of Christ at any time He chooses. For instance, any Christian man may be Spirit-led to give a "word of wisdom" or a "word of knowledge" and yet not be exactly a teacher. Another may be able to point a soul to Christ and yet not be an evangelist.

Again in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul speaks of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues. The question inevitably arises here as to whether we still have gifts of a miraculous nature today. In Hebrews 2:4, it is stated that God used signs and wonders to authenticate the early preaching of the Gospel. This was in days before the complete Word of God was available in written form. Many believe that with the coming of the complete Bible, the need for these miracles ceased. The Bible does

not settle the matter decisively. While we believe that these miracle gifts are not with us today, generally speaking, yet we cannot say that the sovereign Spirit is not at liberty to use them still, especially on those mission fields where the Scriptures are not extensively available. In any event, those who do profess to have these miraculous gifts must be careful to use them in accordance with the instructions of the Word (for example, the use of tongues is regulated in 1 Corinthians 14).

NOTES (2)

In a secondary sense, we doubtless still have apostles, if we simply mean men sent forth by the Lord, In this lesser sense, we still have prophets also, that is, men who cry out for God against sin and abuse But we utterly reject the idea that there are men today who have the same authority as was committed to the original apostles or who can speak by the same direct and inspired revelation as the New Testament prophets.

William MacDonald:

"He careth for you." 1 Peter 5:7

The Bible is fairly full of tokens of God's marvelous care for His people. During Israel's forty-year trek through the wilderness, they ate food from heaven (Ex. 16:4), had an unfailing supply of water (1 Cor. 10:4), and were equipped with shoes that never wore out (Deut. 29:5).

It is the same in our wilderness journey. To prove this, our Lord reminds us how His care for us is so much greater than His care for birds, flowers and animals. He speaks of sparrows, for instance. He provides their food (Matt. 6:26). Not one of them is forgotten before God (Luke 12:6). Not one falls to the ground without Him (Matt. 10:29), or, as H. A. Ironside said, "God attends the funeral of every sparrow." The moral of the story, of course, is that we are of more value to Him than many sparrows (Matt. 10:31).

If He clothes the lilies of the field more beautifully than Solomon was ever attired, He will much more clothe us (Mt. 6:30). If He makes provision for the care of oxen, how much more will He care for our needs (1 Cor. 9:9).

As our High Priest, the Lord Jesus bears our names on His shoulders - the place of power. (Ex. 28:9-12) and on His breast - the place of affection (Ex. 28:12-21). Also our names are engraved in the palms of His hands (Isa. 49:16), a fact that inevitably reminds us of the nail wounds He sustained for us at Calvary.

He knows the exact number of the hairs of our head (Mt. 10:30). He numbers our tossings at night and keeps count of our tears in His book (Psa. 56:8 RSV).

Whoever touches us, touches the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8). No weapon formed against us can prosper (Isa. 54:17).

Whereas the heathen carry their gods on their shoulders (Isa. 46:7), our God carries His people (Isa. 46:4).

When we go through the waters, the rivers or the fire, He is with us (Isa. 43:2). In all our afflictions, He is afflicted (Isa. 63:9).

The One who guards us neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psa. 121:3,4). Someone has called this characteristic of God "the divine insomnia".

The Good Shepherd who gave His life for us will not withhold any good from us (John 10:11; Psa. 84:11; Rom. 8:32).

He cares for us from the beginning of the year to the end (Deut. 11:12). He bears us even to old age (Isa. 46:4). In fact He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). God really cares!

William MacDonald:

Augustine once said, "Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures harmonize." God has divided all human history into ages: "... by whom also he made the ages" (Heb. 1:2 ERV margin). These ages may be long or short. What distinguishes them is not their length but the way in which God deals with mankind.

While God Himself never changes, His methods do. He works in different ways at different times. We sometimes speak of the way God administers His affairs with man during a particular era as a dispensation. Technically, a dispensation does not mean an age but rather an administration, a stewardship, an order, or an economy. But it is difficult for us to think of a dispensation without thinking of time. For example, the history of the United States government has been divided into various administrations. We speak of the Roosevelt administration, the Eisenhower administration, or the Kennedy administration. We mean, of course, the manner in which the government was operated while those presidents were in office. The important point is the policies that were followed, but we necessarily link those policies with a particular period of time.

Therefore, in this lesson we will think of a dispensation as the way in which God deals with men during any particular period of history. God's dispensational dealings may be compared to the way in which a home is run. When there are only a husband and wife in the home, a certain program is followed. But when there are several young children, an entirely new set of policies is introduced. As the children mature, the affairs of the home are handled differently again. We see this same pattern in God's dealings with the human race (Gal. 4:1-5).

For example, when Cain killed his brother Abel, God set a mark on him, so that anyone finding him would not put him to death (Gen. 4: 1-5). Yet after the Flood God instituted capital punishment, decreeing that "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). Why the difference? Because there had been a change in dispensations.

Another example. In Psalm 137:8, 9 the writer calls down severe judgment on Babylon: O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones. Yet later the Lord taught His people:

Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).

It seems obvious that language suitable for the psalmist living under Law would no longer be suitable for a Christian living under grace.

Not all Christians are agreed on the number of dispensations or the names that should be given to them. In fact, not all Christians accept dispensations at all.

But we may demonstrate the existence of dispensations as follows. First of all, there are at least two dispensations-law and grace: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The fact that our Bibles are divided into Old and New Testaments indicates that a change of administration occurred. Further proof is given by the fact that believers in this age are not required to offer animal sacrifices; this too shows that God has introduced a new order.

But if we agree that there are two dispensations, we are forced to believe that there are three, because the Dispensation of Law was not introduced until Exodus 19, hundreds of years after Creation. So there must have been at least one dispensation before the Law (see Rom. 5:14). That makes three.

And then we should be able to agree on a fourth dispensation, because the Scriptures speak of "the age to come" (Heb. 6:5 RSV). This, of course, is the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to reign over the earth, otherwise known as the Millennium.

The Apostle Paul also distinguishes between the present age and an age to come. First he speaks of a dispensation that was committed to him in connection with the truth of the gospel and the Church (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25). That is the present age. But then he also points forward to a future age when, in Ephesians 1:10, he refers to "the dispensation of the fulness of times." It is apparent from his description of it that it has not yet arrived.

So we know that we are not living in the final age of the world's history.

Dr. C. I. Scofield, editor of the Scofield Reference Bible, lists seven dispensations, as follows:

Innocence (Gen. 1:28). From Adam's creation up to his fall.

Conscience or Moral Responsibility (Gen. 3:7). From the fall to the end of the Flood.

Human Government (Gen. 8:15). From the end of the Flood to the call of Abraham.

Promise (Gen. 12:1). From the call of Abraham to the giving of the Law.

Law (Exod. 19:1). From the giving of the Law to the Day of Pentecost.

Church (Acts 2:1). From the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture.

Kingdom (Rev. 20:4). The thousand-year reign of Christ.

In his chart, "The Course of Time from Eternity to Eternity," A. E. Booth sees seven dispensations of human history foreshadowed in the seven days of Genesis:

First day-Man tested with the light of creation-light and promise.
 Second day-Government (from the Flood to the dividing of the nations).
 Third day-Israel (from Abraham to the end of the Gospels).
 Fourth day-Grace (a parenthesis period).
 Fifth day-The Tribulation.
 Sixth day-The Millennium.
 Seventh day-Eternity.

While it is not important to agree on the exact details, it is quite important to see that there are different dispensations. The distinction between law and grace is especially important. Otherwise we will take portions of Scripture that apply to other ages and refer them to ourselves. While all Scriptures are profitable for us (2 Tim. 3:16), not all were written directly to us. Passages dealing with other ages have applications for us, but their primary interpretation is for the age for which they were written. For example, Jews living under the Law were forbidden to eat the meat of any unclean animal, that is, one that did not have a cloven hoof and did not chew the cud (Lev. 11:3). This prohibition is not binding on Christians today (Mark 7:18, 19), but the underlying principle remains -that we should avoid moral and spiritual uncleanness.

God promised the people of Israel that if they obeyed Him, He would make them materially prosperous (Deut. 28:1-6). The emphasis then was on material blessings in earthly places. But this is not true today. God does not promise that He will reward our obedience with financial prosperity. Instead, the blessings of this dispensation are spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3).

While there are differences among the various ages, there is one thing that never changes, and that is the gospel. Salvation always has been, is now, and always will be by faith in the Lord. And the basis of salvation for every age is the finished work of Christ on Calvary's Cross. People in the Old Testament were saved by believing whatever revelation the Lord gave them. Abraham, for example, was saved by believing God when He said that the patriarch's seed would be as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5, 6). Abraham did not know much, if anything, about what would take place at Calvary centuries later. But God knew. And when Abraham believed the Lord, He put to Abraham's account all the value of the future work of Christ at Calvary.

Someone has said that the Old Testament saints were saved "on credit." That is to say, they were saved on the basis of the price that the Lord Jesus would pay many years later (that is the meaning of Romans 3:25). We are saved on the basis of the work which Christ accomplished over 1900 years ago. But in both cases salvation is by faith in the Lord.

We must guard against any idea that people in the Dispensation of Law were saved by keeping the Law or even by offering animal sacrifices. The Law can only condemn; it cannot save (Rom. 3:20). And the blood of bulls and goats cannot put away a single sin (Heb. 10:4). No! God's way of salvation is by faith and faith alone! (See Romans 5:1.)

Another good point to remember is this: when we speak of the present age as being the Age of Grace, we do not imply that God was not gracious in past dispensations. We simply mean that God is now testing man under grace rather than under law. This distinction will be explained more fully in a future lesson.

It is also important to realize that the ages do not close with split-second precision. Often there is an overlapping or a transition period. We see this in the Book of Acts, for instance; it took awhile for the new Church to throw off some of the trappings of the previous dispensation. And it is possible that there will be a period of time between the Rapture and the Tribulation during which the Man of Sin will be manifested and the Temple will be erected in Jerusalem.

One final word. Like all good things, the study of dispensations can be abused. There are some Christians who carry dispensationalism to such an extreme that they accept only Paul's Prison Epistles as applicable for the Church today! As a result they do not accept baptism or the Lord's supper, since these are not found in the Prison Epistles. They also teach that Peter's gospel message was not the same as Paul's. (See Galatians 1:8, 9 for a refutation of this.) These people are sometimes called ultra-dispensationalists or Bullingerites (after a teacher named E. W. Bullinger). Their extreme view of dispensations should be rejected.

TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST

To understand and enjoy the Scriptures, it is necessary to differentiate between the first and second comings of Christ. His First Coming refers, of course, to His birth as a baby in Bethlehem's manger. The Second Coming points forward to the time when He will return. The first is concerned with the sufferings of Christ, the second with the glory that will follow (1 Peter 1:11).

In this chapter we will present Christ's Second Coming in a general way, presenting only the simple fact that the Savior is coming again. In the next chapter we will see that there are several phases to His Second Coming.

The Old Testament prophets foresaw the coming of the Messiah, but they were confused by what they saw. The Spirit of God revealed to them that the Christ would come in both humiliation and glory. He would suffer, bleed, and die, but He would also triumph over all His foes. They could not reconcile this. What they didn't realize was that they were dealing with two distinct advents of the Messiah, with more than 1900 years between them.

Oftentimes the two comings are merged together in the Bible with no indication of an intervening time period. If we can learn to detect these quick transitions, it will add greatly to our pleasure and profit. Here are some examples.

The first twenty-one verses of Psalm 22 clearly refer to the First Advent; they depict the sufferings of the Savior on the Cross. But there is a distinct break between verses 21 and 22. The last ten verses of the psalm point forward to the victory and glory of the Second Advent.

We also find the two comings in Isaiah 9:6, 7:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

The coming to Bethlehem is described by the words "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." All the rest of the verses point forward to the time when He will return to reign in power and great glory.

The two advents are also found in Isaiah 49:7:

Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

The first advent is apparent in the words "to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers," but the rest of the verse points unmistakably to His second coming.

Now notice Isaiah 52:14, 15:

Even as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him, for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Verse 14 obviously describes the Savior on the Cross; those who watched the Crucifixion were astonished at the depths of His suffering. He was so disfigured that He was no longer recognizable as a man. But there is a tremendous contrast in verse 15. When the Savior comes back, men will be astonished at the brilliance of His glory. The nations will be startled to see the lowly Stranger of Galilee returning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

One of the best-known examples of a passage where the two advents are blended is Isaiah 61:1, 2:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn.

When Jesus was in the synagogue in Nazareth He quoted from these verses (Luke 4:18, 19). But notice that He stopped with the words "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." He did not continue to the expression, "and the day of vengeance of our God." Why? Because His First Advent ushered in the acceptable year of the Lord. His Second Advent will begin "the day of vengeance of our God."

We have a similar illustration of the two advents in Psalm 34:15, 16:

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

When Peter quotes these verses in 1 Peter 3:12 he stops short of the words "to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." All the rest of the quotation applies to the age in which we are now living, but this final expression looks forward to the Second Advent of Christ.

The prophet Micah foretold that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah (Mic. 5:2):

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

But then Micah quickly skipped over to Christ's Second Coming, when He will be great unto the ends of the earth (Mic. 5:4):

And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

In Zechariah 9:9 we have an obvious prediction of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion; shout, o daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

But the next verse carries us forward to the Second Coming, when Christ will reign from sea to sea:

And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace unto the heathen, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

We find the two comings merged in the New Testament as well as in the Old. Take Luke 1:31-33, for example: And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father

David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

The first verse was obviously fulfilled when Jesus was born (see Matt. 1:25). But verses 32 and 33 pass over this present Church Age to the time when Christ will return to sit upon the throne of David and to rule over the earth.

There is a veiled reference to the two advents in Luke 20:18:

Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

In the first part of the verse, the stone (Christ) is on the earth. During His Incarnation men fell on Him and were broken. In the second half of the verse, the stone is coming down from above. When Christ comes back He will scatter the disobedient as dust.

A final and more obvious instance of the combination of the two comings is found in Hebrews 9:26, 28:

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world; but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.... So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

He appeared once to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; that was His First Advent. He will appear the second time without sin unto salvation; that is when He comes again.

PHASES OF CHRIST'S RETURN

In the previous lesson we saw that it is necessary to differentiate between the first and second advents of Christ. The first belongs to history; it took place almost 2000 years ago. The second belongs to prophecy; it is still future.

But it is necessary to realize that the Second Coming of Christ is not a single event. Rather, it stretches over a period of time and has four stages or phases. So in this lesson we want to distinguish these phases.

In the original language of the New Testament the common word for "coming" means "a presence" or "a coming alongside." It denotes an arrival and a subsequent presence. It was commonly used in connection with the arrival of a king and the visit that followed.

Even in the English language the word "coming" is used in this way. For instance, Christ's coming to Galilee brought healing to multitudes. Here we do not mean simply the day He arrived in Galilee, but the whole period of time He spent in that area.

So when we think of Christ's Second Coming we should think of a period of time rather than an isolated event. This period of time has four stages, as follows:

1. A beginning
2. A course
3. A manifestation
4. A climax

1. The Beginning of Christ's Coming

The beginning of Christ's Coming is the Rapture, that is, the Coming of Christ for His saints. He will come to the air, the dead in Christ will be raised, living believers will be changed, and all will go to the Father's house. This could take place at any moment and will take place in a moment of time.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:22, 23 ERV).

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18 ERV).

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him (2 Thess. 2:1 ERV).

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord is at hand (James 5:7, 8 ERV).

And now, my little children, abide in him, that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:28 ERV).

Other passages which refer to the Rapture are John 14:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 9:28; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:7, 20.

2. The Course of Christ's Coming

The second stage, the course of Christ's coming, includes the Judgment Seat of Christ, when rewards will be given to believers for faithful service.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye before our Lord Jesus at his coming? (1 Thess. 2:19 ERV).

And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23 ERV).

See also Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

Another event which should probably be included in the course of Christ's Coming is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. From its location in the Book of Revelation we know it will take place prior to Christ's glorious reign. We include it here even if the word "coming" is not used in connection with it.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of God (Rev. 19:6-9 ERV).

While these events are taking place in heaven the earth will be experiencing a time of tribulation. This will be a period of approximately seven years during which God will pour out judgments of ever-increasing intensity upon the earth (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:4-28; Rev. 6-19). The last half of the period is known as the Great Tribulation; it will witness distress and disasters of unprecedented severity (Matt. 24:15-31).

3. The Manifestation of Christ's Coming

The third phase is the manifestation of Christ's coming, that is, His return to earth in power and great glory to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Rapture will not be seen by the world; it will take place in a split second. But every eye will see Christ when He comes to reign. Therefore it is called the manifestation of His coming. This is the third phase of His coming.

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matt. 24:3 ERV).

For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:27 ERV).

And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:37 ERV).

And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:39 ERV).

To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (1 Thess. 3:13 ERV).

And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming (2 Thess. 2:8 ERV).

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Pet. 1:16 ERV). (Here Peter is speaking about the manifestation of Christ's coming as it was pre-pictured on the Mount of Transfiguration.)

Other references to this third stage of Christ's coming are Zechariah 14:4; Malachi 4:1-3; Acts 1:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Jude 14; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-16.

4. The Climax of Christ's Coming

The final stage is the climax of Christ's coming, the destruction of the heavens and earth by fire. It follows the thousand year reign of Christ on earth. It is referred to in 2 Peter 3:4, 7-13:

And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For from the day that the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.... But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But,

beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat! Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

In this chapter we read of scoffers who will arise in the last days, denying the probability of Christ's Return. What aspect of His coming do they mean?

Are they referring to the Rapture? No. They probably know nothing about the Rapture. Are they referring to Christ's Coming to Reign? No. It is apparent that they are not. The entire context indicates that what they are ridiculing is the final punishment of all evil doers by the Lord. They mean a last climactic judgment of God on the earth, or what they call "the end of the world." Their argument is that they have nothing to worry about. God hasn't intervened in history and He won't intervene in the future. So they feel free to continue in their evil words and deeds.

Peter answers their scoffing by pointing forward to the time, after the thousand-year reign of Christ, when the heavens and the earth as we now know them will be utterly destroyed. This climax of Christ's coming will occur after the Millennium and at the inauguration of the Eternal State.

"But," someone may ask, "How do you know that the first and third stages, the Rapture and Revelation, are separate events?" The answer is that they are differentiated in the Scriptures in the following ways:

The Rapture The Revelation

1. Christ comes to the air (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
2. He comes for His saints (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
3. The Rapture is a mystery, i.e., a truth unknown in Old Testament times (1 Cor. 15:51).
4. Christ's Coming for His saints is never said to be preceded by signs in the heavens.
5. The Rapture is identified with the Day of Christ (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10).
6. The Rapture is presented as a time of blessing (1 Thess. 4:18).
7. The Rapture takes place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52). This strongly implies that it will not be witnessed by the world.
8. The Rapture seems to involve the Church primarily (John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
9. Christ comes as the Bright and Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).
1. He comes to the earth (Zech. 14:4).
2. He comes with His saints (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14).
3. The Revelation is not a mystery; it is the subject of many Old Testament prophecies (Psa. 72; Isa. 11; Zech. 14).
4. Christ's Coming with His saints will be heralded by signs in the heavens. (Matt. 24:29, 30).
5. The Revelation is identified with the Day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:1-12, ASV).
6. The main emphasis of the Revelation is on judgment (2 Thess. 2:8-12).
7. The Revelation will be visible worldwide (Matt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7).
8. The Revelation involves Israel primarily, then also the Gentile nations (Matt. 24:1-25:46).
9. Christ comes as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2).

LAW AND GRACE

Law and grace are two opposite ways in which God deals with the human race. We can describe them as dissimilar principles under which He tests man. Or we think of them as two covenants that He has made with His people: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Under the principle of law, man receives what he earns or deserves. Under grace he is spared from what he deserves and is enriched beyond description—all as a free gift. The two principles are described in Romans 4:4, 5:

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Grace and law are mutually exclusive; that is, they cannot be mixed..... If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace" (Rom. 11:6).

Law is a conditional covenant: God says, "If you obey, I will reward you, but if you disobey, I must punish you." Grace is an unconditional covenant: God says, "I will bless you freely."

The law says Do, whereas grace says Believe. But believing is not a condition; it is the only reasonable response of a creature to his Creator. And it is not meritorious; no one can be proud that he has believed on the Lord. He would be foolish not to believe on the only dependable Person in the universe.

Under law holiness is required but no power is given to live a holy life. Under grace holiness is taught (Tit. 2:11, 12) and the necessary power is given. Someone has put it this way: "The Law demands strength from one who has none and curses him if he can't display it. Grace gives strength to one who has none and blesses him in the exhibition of it."

The Law brings a curse: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3: 10). Grace brings a blessing: " Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

Under law boasting is encouraged, but under grace it is ruled out. "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith" (Rom. 3:27 RSV).

There cannot be any assurance of salvation under law: a man could never know whether he had performed enough good works or the right kind of good works. Under grace there is full assurance because salvation is a gift; you know when you have received a gift!

A person under law could not have true security because he could not be sure he would continue to meet the requirements. Under grace the believer enjoys eternal security (John 10:27-29) because his salvation depends on the work of Christ.

There is no salvation by the law. God never intended that anyone would ever be saved on that principle. The purpose of the Law is to show man that he is a sinner. " By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) -not the knowledge of salvation.

Salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8,9). It is the free, undeserved gift of God to those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope for heaven.

Under law sin is aroused (Rom. 7:8-13); under grace it is despised. When sinful man is put under law he immediately wants to do what is forbidden. It is not the law's fault, but the response of sin in man's nature. Under grace, sin is despised. The memory of what our sins cost the Savior makes us turn away from them.

Under law the work is never finished. That is why the Sabbath, the seventh day, came at the end of a week of toil. Grace tells us of a finished work, so we begin our week with the Lord's Day, our day of rest.

The Law tells what man must do. Grace reveals what God has done in Christ.

The Law is a system of bondage (Gal. 4:1-3); grace is a system of liberty (Gal. 5:1). Men under law are servants; men under grace are sons.

The Law says, "Thou shalt love." Grace says, "God so loved..."

The Law says, "Do and thou shalt live." Grace says, "Live and thou shalt do."

The Law says, "Try and obey." Grace says, "Trust and obey."

Under law a wayward son was taken outside the city and stoned to death (Deut. 21:18-21). Under grace the prodigal son can confess his sin and come back into the fellowship of his father's house again (Luke 15:21-24).

Under law the sheep die for the shepherd. Under grace the shepherd dies for the sheep (John 10:11).

The superiority of grace has been described as follows: grace is not looking for good men whom it may approve, for it is not grace but justice to approve goodness; but it is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless, and helpless men whom it may save, sanctify, and glorify.

THREE TENSES OF SALVATION

When we first become Christians most of us can think of only one type of salvation, the salvation of our souls. In our Bible study we automatically try to fit this meaning into every occurrence of the word. But soon we find that it will not always fit.

Then we come to realize that salvation is a very general word meaning deliverance, safety, or soundness. In Philippians 1: 19, for example, Paul uses it concerning his expected release from prison:

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 2:12 salvation means something quite different; it means the solution of a problem that had broken out in the church at Philippi. A serious case of disunity had arisen (Phil. 2:1-4; 4:2). Paul reminds the Christians that the answer to the problem was for them all to have the humble, self-sacrificing mind of the Lord Jesus. Then in verse 12 he says:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

In other words, "I have told you the way of deliverance from the problem that vexes you. Now work out the solution with fear and trembling.

In three passages salvation is used to describe deliverance from drowning:

And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved (Acts 27:30, 31).

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house (Heb. 11:7).

...he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight, persons were saved through water (1 Pet. 3:19, 20 RSV).

But the uses of the words "salvation" or "saved" in which we are principally interested are those which have to do with deliverance from sin. This is the most common meaning in the New Testament.

Here we must learn to distinguish the three tenses of salvation-past, present, and future:

Past-I was saved from the penalty of sin.

Present-I am being saved from the power of sin.

Future-I shall be saved from the presence of sin.

Past Tense

Here are some verses which speak primarily of salvation from the penalty of sin:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8 RSV).

(God) who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5).

Note: In these three examples the word "saved" is in the past tense. However, there are other verses which speak of our deliverance from the penalty of sin where the verb is not in the past tense.

Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Rom. 10:9).

So you must decide by the contents of the verse rather than by the tense of the verb whether the past tense of salvation is meant. If the subject is the once-for-all deliverance from the condemnation of sin, then you know it is the past tense of salvation.

Present Tense

Although it is true that I have been saved, it is equally true that I am being saved day by day. I have been saved from damnation; I am being saved from damage. I have been saved from the penalty of sin; I am being saved from the power of sin. I have been saved through the finished work of Christ on the Cross; I am being saved through His life and ministry for me at the right hand of God. That is what is meant, for example, in Romans 5:10:

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.

The present tense of salvation is much the same as sanctification-the process of being separated to God from sin and defilement. It is this salvation as a continuing process that we read about in Hebrews 7:25:

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Future Tense

Finally, there is the future aspect of salvation. When we meet the Savior face-to-face we shall be saved from sin's presence. Our bodies will be redeemed and glorified. The following verses describe the glorious-future consummation of our salvation.

For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed (Rom. 13:11).

But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:8,

Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).

(You) who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5).

All Three Tenses

If you have difficulty fitting a verse into one of these classes, remember that it might be applicable to all three tenses. Here are a couple of examples:

Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

In him you also who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13 RSV).

So in cases like these you don't have to choose, because they apply with equal force to all three phases of salvation.

JUDICIAL AND PARENTAL FORGIVENESS

Two different kinds of forgiveness are found in the Scriptures, and if we are going to be careful students of the Word, we must learn to distinguish them. We will call them judicial and parental forgiveness (though these names themselves are not used in the Bible).

To put it very simply, judicial forgiveness is the forgiveness of a judge and parental forgiveness is the forgiveness of a father. The first term is taken from the courtroom and the second from the home.

First let us go to the courtroom. God is the Judge and sinful man is the person on trial. Man is guilty of sinning, and the penalty is eternal death. But the Lord Jesus appears and announces, "I will pay the penalty which man's sins deserved; I will die as a Substitute for him!" This is what the Savior did on the Cross of Calvary. Now the Judge announces to sinful man, -if you will surrender to my Son as your Lord and Savior, I will forgive you." As soon as the man puts his faith in the Savior, he receives judicial forgiveness of all his sins.

He will never have to pay the punishment for them in hell, because Christ has paid it all. The forgiven sinner now enters into a new relationship: God is no longer his Judge; now He is his Father.

So now we move into the home for an illustration of parental forgiveness. God is the Father and the believer is the child. In an unguarded moment, the child commits an act of sin. Then what happens? Does God sentence the child to die for the sin? Of course not, because God is no longer the Judge, but the Father! What does happen? Well, fellowship in the family is broken. The happy family spirit is gone. The child has not lost his salvation, but he has lost the joy of his salvation. Soon he may experience the discipline of his Father, designed to bring him back into fellowship. As soon as the child confesses his sin, he receives parental forgiveness.

Judicial forgiveness takes place once-for-all at the time of conversion; parental forgiveness takes place every time a believer confesses and forsakes his sin. This is what Jesus taught in John 13:8-10: we need the bath of regeneration only once to deliver us from the penalty of sins, but we need many cleansings throughout our Christian lives to give us parental forgiveness.

The difference between the two types of forgiveness may be summarized graphically as follows:

Judicial	Parental
The Person's Status	Sinner
(Romans 3:23)	Child
(1 John 3:2)	
Relationship of God	Judge
(Psa. 96:13)	Father
(Gal. 4:6)	
Result of sin	Eternal death
(Rom. 6:23)	Broken fellowship
(1 John 1:6)	
Role of Christ	Savior
(1 Tim. 1:15)	High Priest and Advocate
(Heb. 4:14-16; 1 John 2:1)	
The Person's Need	Salvation
(Acts 16:30)	Joy of salvation
(Psa. 51:12)	
Means of Forgiveness	Faith
(Acts 16:31)	Confession
(1 John 1:9)	
Kind of Forgiveness	Judicial
(Rom. 8:1)	Parental
(Luke 15:21,22)	
Consequence Averted	Hell

(John 5:24) Chastening
 (1 Cor. 11:31, 32)
 Loss of reward at the Judgment Seat Of Christ
 (1 Cor. 3:15)
 Positive Result New relation-ship
 (John 1 :12) Renewed fellow-ship
 (Psa. 32:5)
 Frequency Once (One bath of regeneration)
 (John 13:10) Many times (many cleansings)
 (John 13:8)

From now on, when we come to verses that speak about the once-for-all forgiveness that is granted to us as sinners through the work of Christ, we will know that the subject is judicial forgiveness. The following illustrate this:

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:7).

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:32 RSV).

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:13).

However, there are other passages of Scripture that deal with parental forgiveness:
 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14, 15).
 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven (Luke 6:37).

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses (Mark 11:25).

Notice that in two of these verses God is specifically mentioned as Father: it is the Father's forgiveness that is involved. Notice also that our being forgiven depends on our willingness to forgive others. That is not true of judicial forgiveness; willingness to forgive others is not a condition of salvation. But it is true of parental forgiveness; our Father will not forgive us if we don't forgive one another.

In Matthew 18:23-35 The Lord Jesus told the story of a slave who had been forgiven 10,000 talents by the king. But that same slave wouldn't forgive one of his fellow-slaves 100 pence. The king was therefore angry with him and delivered him to the jailers till he paid all his debt. The Lord Jesus concluded the parable by saying, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Here again it is a matter of the Father's forgiveness. It is sin to have an unforgiving spirit, and God cannot forgive us parentally until we confess that sin and forsake it.

One of the thrills of Bible study is to see these basic distinctions and to be able to apply them in our daily reading. From now on when you come to the subject of forgiveness in the Word you should be able to say, "Oh, yes, that refers to judicial forgiveness" or else "that must refer to the Father's forgiveness of His child."

KINDS OF SANCTIFICATION

The word "sanctify" means "to set apart". There is a whole family of words-sanctify, sanctification, saint, holy, holiness, consecrate, consecration-that all have the same root meaning. Very often sanctification means the process of separating from common or unclean uses to divine service. But not always. If you just remember that to sanctify means to set apart, you will have a definition that fits all cases.

In the Old Testament God sanctified the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). The firstborn of both men and animals were sanctified to the Lord (Exod. 13:2). The priests were told to consecrate themselves to the Lord (Exod. 19:22). The Tabernacle and all its furniture were sanctified (Exod. 40:9).

In the New Testament sanctification is used primarily in regard to people. However, The Lord Jesus said that the Temple sanctifies the gold on it, and that the altar sanctifies the gift on it (Matt. 23:17, 19). Paul taught that when we give thanks for our food, it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim. 4:5).

With regard to the sanctification of persons, God consecrated Christ and sent Him into the world (John 10:36); that is, the Father set apart His Son for the work of saving us from our sins. The Lord Jesus consecrated Himself (John 17:19); in other words, He set Himself apart in order to intercede for His people.

There is even a sense in which certain unbelievers are sanctified. "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband" (1 Cor. 7:14). This means that the

unbelieving partner is set apart in a position of privilege by having a Christian spouse praying for his salvation. And there is a sense in which Christ should be sanctified by all believers. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . (1 Pet. 3:15). We sanctify Him by setting Him apart as undisputed Sovereign in our lives.

In addition to the above, however, there are four other important kinds of sanctification which we should distinguish in our study of the New Testament. These are called pre-conversion sanctification, positional sanctification, progressive sanctification, and perfect sanctification.

Pre-Conversion Sanctification

Long before a person is born again, the Holy Spirit has been working in his life, setting him apart from the world to belong to Christ. Paul realized that he had been set apart before he was born (Gal. 1:15). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, the Apostle reminds the Thessalonians that there were three steps in their salvation:

1. Their selection by God.
2. Their sanctification by the Spirit.
3. Their belief in the truth.

Notice that this sanctification was before they believed and were saved.

In 1 Peter 1:2, the order of events connected with salvation is linked as follows:

1. Choice and destiny by God the Father.
2. Sanctification by the Spirit.
3. Obedience to Jesus Christ.
4. Sprinkling with His blood.

In eternity God chose us to belong to Himself. In time the Holy Spirit set us apart for the Lord. Then we obeyed the gospel. As soon as we did, all the value of the shed blood of Christ was credited to our account. But the point to notice here is that the sanctification Peter speaks of is a kind that takes place before a person is born again.

Positional Sanctification

The moment a person is born again he becomes positionally sanctified. This means that as far as his standing before God is concerned, he is perfectly set apart to God from the world because he is "in Christ." In a very real sense Christ is his sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30).

Every true believer is a saint; he has been separated to the Lord. This is his position. Thus in 1 Corinthians 1:2 all the Christians in the local church in Corinth are described as sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. "They weren't always very saintly. They tolerated sin in the fellowship (1 Cor. 5:1, 2). They went to law against one another (1 Cor. 6:1). They had teachers who denied the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:33, 34). But it was still true of them that as far as their position was concerned, they were saints-sanctified in Christ Jesus.

Now let us look at some of the passages that deal with positional sanctification. In Acts 20:32, the expression "all them which are sanctified" means all believers. In Acts 26:18 the Lord described His people as those "which are sanctified by faith that is in me." The Corinthians are described as having been "washed ... sanctified ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6: 11). And the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Positional sanctification is also indicated at times by the use of the word "holy." Thus in Colossians 3:12, when Paul addresses the Christians as "holy," he is referring to their standing before God.

Progressive Sanctification

While there are many Scriptures which say that all Christians are sanctified, there are many others which say that they should be sanctified. If we fail to distinguish the kinds of sanctification, we can find this very confusing.

Progressive or practical sanctification refers to what we should be in our everyday lives. We should be living lives of separation to God from sin and evil. Saints should be becoming more saintly all the time.

It was this aspect of sanctification that the Lord Jesus referred to in John 17:17 when He prayed for His own, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

The believer's cooperation is involved in this (2 Tim. 2:21). Wherever you find exhortations concerning sanctification or holiness you can be sure that the subject is practical sanctification. Thus Paul urged the Corinthians, " . . . let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). And in the same vein Peter wrote, ". . . as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15).

One particular form of practical sanctification concerns separation from immorality. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. 4:3, 4).

How does a Christian become more holy, more like the Lord Jesus? The answer is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Practical holiness comes from being occupied with the Lord. It is a principle in life that we become like what we worship. The more we behold Christ, the more we become like Him. The Holy Spirit works this marvelous transformation-not all at once, but from one degree of glory to another!

Perfect Sanctification

This aspect of sanctification is still future for the believer. When he sees the Savior face-to-face he will be forever set apart from all sin and defilement. He will be morally like the Lord Jesus-perfectly sanctified.

This is what we read about in Colossians 1:22: "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight."

In that day the Church will have its ultimate sanctification: "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

Other passages describe our perfect sanctification without mentioning the word. John, for instance, says, ". . . we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). And Jude reminds us that our Lord will present us "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Now it will be extremely helpful in your study of the Bible to distinguish these various aspects of sanctification. Whenever you find words that deal with holiness, ask yourself, "Is this what happened before conversion? Is this what I am in Christ? Is this what I should be day by day? Or is this what I will be when I am ushered into the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ?"

ASPECTS OF JUSTIFICATION

The New Testament teaches that we are justified by grace, by faith, by blood, by power, and by works. This is apt to prove confusing, if not contradictory, unless we realize that in each case a different aspect of the same subject is being presented.

First of all, what does justification mean? To justify means to reckon righteous. It does not mean to make righteous, but to declare to be righteous. Actually it is a legal term; it comes from the courtroom.

We are not righteous in ourselves. We have no righteousness. But when we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God reckons us to be righteous on the basis of Christ's substitutionary work. When we are "in Christ," God can righteously declare us to be righteous because full satisfaction has been made at Calvary for all our sins. The believing sinner is clothed in all the righteousness of God. "For he (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us, (He) who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

As we mentioned at the outset, justification is said to be by grace, by faith, by blood, by power, and by works. How can it be by all these five ways?

First, justification is by grace. In Romans 3:24 we read, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This means that man does not deserve to be justified. He cannot merit it or earn it; he must receive it as a gift. Grace is the term upon which God gives justification to man-completely undeserved and unbought-freely, as a gift.

Second, justification is by faith, "Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). This means that the sinner must receive justification by a definite act of trust in the Savior. Confessing himself to be worthy only of hell, he must accept the Lord Jesus as the One who paid the penalty of his sins on the Cross.

Grace is God stooping down to guilty man and offering justification as a free gift on the basis of Christ's redemptive work at Calvary. Faith is repentant man reaching up and receiving the gift from God without any thought of deserving it by his character or earning it by his works.

Justification is also by blood. "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9). This, of course, refers to the price which had to be paid in order that I might be justified. The sinless Savior shed His precious blood to settle the debt that my sins had accumulated. The enormous value of my justification is seen in the staggering price that was paid to secure it.

While there is no Scripture that says in so many words that we are justified by power, the truth is contained in Romans 4:25: "(He) was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Here our justification is directly connected with the Resurrection of Christ. And rightly so! If He had not risen our faith would be futile, and we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). So our justification is inseparably linked with the power that raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. That is why we say that we are justified by power.

Finally, we are justified by works. "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Here is where a distinct contradiction seems to appear. The Apostle Paul teaches unmistakably that we are justified by faith alone. But James seems to say here, "Not so. We are justified by faith and by

works." However, that is not what James is saying. He does not teach that justification is obtained initially by doing good works. Neither does he say that we are justified by faith plus works. What he is saying is that we are justified by the kind of faith that results in a life of good works.

It is futile for a man to say he has faith if he doesn't have works to back it up. That kind of faith-that is, a faith of words only, is worthless (James 2:14-17). True faith is invisible but can be demonstrated by works (James 2:18). Abraham was justified by believing the Lord (Gen. 15:6), but years later he showed that his faith was genuine by being willing to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:9-14). Rahab proved the reality of her faith by harboring the Israeli spies and helping them escape (James 2:25). So when we speak of justification by works we mean that works are the outward manifestation that we have truly been justified by faith. Works are not the cause; they are the effect. They are not the root; they are the fruit.

Putting these all together, we find that the New Testament teaches that we are justified by:
 grace-this means we don't deserve it.

faith-this means we must receive it.

blood-this means it was purchased by the Savior's death.

power-this means that the Resurrection proves God's satisfaction with the Savior's work.

works-this means that when we are genuinely justified by faith, there will be good works to prove it.

All these aspects of justification have been expressed poetically as follows:

God's sov'reign grace selected me
 To have in heav'n a place;
 'Twas the good pleasure of His will;
 I'm justified by grace.
 In due time Christ on Calv'ry died;
 There flowed that crimson flood
 Which makes the foulest white as snow;
 I'm justified by blood.

God raised Him up; this is the pledge,
 Should evil doubtings lower;
 His resurrection quells each fear;
 I'm justified by power.

The Holy Spirit guided me
 To what the Scripture saith;
 I grasped the truth; Christ died for me!
 I'm justified by faith.

Now if you doubt that I am Christ's,
 If one suspicion lurks,
 I'll show by deed that I am His;
 I'm justified by works.

I praise the Lord, 'tis all of Him,
 The grace, the faith, the blood,
 The resurrection pow'r, the works;
 I'm justified by God!
 -Helen H. Shaw

POSITION AND PRACTICE

There is no key more helpful in unlocking the New Testament than an understanding of the difference between the believer's position and his practice. If you do not see this distinction, there will be times when passages will be positively confusing and even seemingly contradictory.

Position and practice are sometimes spoken of as standing and state; the meaning is the same. In brief, a Christian's position is his standing in Christ-what he is in Christ. His practice is what he is in himself-or better, what he should be. The first has to do with doctrine, the second with duty.

There is a difference between what a believer is in Christ and what he is in himself. Grace has given the man in Christ an absolutely perfect standing before God. He is accepted in the Beloved One (Eph. 1:6) and complete in Christ (Col. 2:10). His sins have been forgiven and he is clothed in all the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). It is no presumption for him to say:

Near, so very near to God,
 I could not nearer be;

For in the Person of God's Son
I am as near as He.
Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I could not be;
The love with which He loves His Son,
That is His love to me.

The believer's practice is something else again. Unfortunately, it is far from perfect. In most cases it varies from day to day. Sometimes the believer is on the mountaintop spiritually. At other times he may be in the valley of defeat.

Now God's will is that our practice should increasingly correspond to our position. Out of love for the One who died for us, our everyday lives should be constantly growing in Christlikeness. Of course, we will never reach a perfect state in this life; that will never happen until we die or until the Savior comes. But the process should be going on; we should be becoming in practice more and more like what we are in position.

When we see the Savior we will be automatically like Him (1 John 3:2). This transformation will take place by divine power, without our cooperation. But it brings more glory to God if His people are growing in the likeness of the Lord Jesus in this life.

How can you tell whether a particular passage is speaking about our position or our practice? Well, watch for such phrases as "in Christ," "in the Beloved," or "in Him"; when you find such phrases, you can usually be sure that the writer is speaking about our position (see Eph. 1:3-14). The best way to identify our practice is to notice when we find a verse that tells us what we ought to be or do.

The invariable order in the New Testament is to find position first, then practice. Several of the Epistles are structured on this order. In Ephesians, for instance, the first three chapters describe what we are in Christ; the last three describe what we should be in daily living. In the first three chapters we find ourselves in heavenly places in Christ; in the last three we are tackling the nitty-gritty problems of the home and the business world.

Now let us see how helpful it is to be aware of this distinction as we study the New Testament. Here are seven simple examples of the difference between position and practice.

Position Practice

Example 1

For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14). Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

The first verse says that all believers are perfect; the second says that all believers should be perfect. This would sound like double-talk if we did not realize that the first speaks of our standing and the second of our state.

Example 2

How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? (Rom. 6:2). Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (Rom. 6:11).

You are dead to sin-this is the position into which grace has put you. Now be dead to sin day by day-this is what your practice should be.

Example 3

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1:12). Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children (Eph. 5:1).

As soon as a person is born again he becomes a child of God. From then on he should be a follower of God as a beloved child. All who are God's children are expected to bear the family likeness, that is, to be godly.

Example 4

God is faithful, by whom y

Hindrances To Discipleship

William MacDonald:

Anyone who sets out to follow Christ can be sure that many escape routes will loom up before him. He will be given numerous opportunities to turn back. Other voices will call to him, offering to cut inches off the cross. Twelve legions of angels stand ready to deliver him from the path of self-renunciation and sacrifice.

This is remarkably illustrated in the account of three would-be disciples who allowed other voices to take precedence over the voice of Christ.

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." And Jesus said unto him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." And he said unto another, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus said unto him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." And Jesus said unto him, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:57-62).

Three unnamed men came face to face with Jesus Christ. They felt an inner compulsion to follow Him. But they permitted something else to come between their souls and complete dedication to Him.

Mr. Too Quick

The first man has been called Mr. Too Quick. He enthusiastically volunteered to follow the Lord anywhere. "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." No cost would be too great. No cross would be too heavy. No path would be too rough.

The Savior's reply at first seems to have no connection with the willing-hearted offer of Mr. Too Quick. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Actually the Lord's answer was most appropriate. It was as if He said, "You claim to be willing to follow me anywhere, but are you willing to do without the material comforts of life? Foxes have more of this world's comforts than I have. The birds have a nest they can call their own. But I am a homeless Wanderer in the world my hands have made. Are you willing to sacrifice the security of a home to follow me? Are you willing to forego the legitimate comforts of life in order to serve me devotedly?"

Apparently the man was not willing, because we hear no more of him in the Sacred Scriptures. His love for earthly conveniences was greater than his dedication to Christ!

Mr. Too Slow

The second man has been called Mr. Too Slow. He did not volunteer, like the first man; rather the Savior called him to be a follower. His reply was not an outright refusal. It was not that he was completely disinterested in the Lord. Rather there was something he wanted to do first. This was his great sin. He put his own claims above the claims of Christ. Notice his reply, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father."

Now it is perfectly legitimate for a son to show common respect to his parent. And if a father has died, it is certainly within the bounds of the Christian faith that he should be given a decent burial.

But the legitimate courtesies of life become positively sinful when they take priority over the interests of the Lord Jesus. The real ambition of this man's life is exposed by his naked request, "Lord, ...me first..." The other words he spoke were mere camouflage to hide his underlying desire to put self first.

Apparently he did not realize that the words "Lord, ...me first" are a moral absurdity and impossibility. If Christ is Lord, then He must come first. If the personal pronoun "I" is on the throne, then Christ is no longer in control.

Mr. Too Slow had a job to accomplish, and he let this job have first place. It was therefore fitting that Jesus should say to him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." We might paraphrase His words as follows: "There are certain things which the spiritually dead can do just as well as believers. But there are other things in life which only a believer can do. See that you do not spend your life doing what an unconverted man could have done just as well. Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. But as for you—be indispensable. Let the main thrust of your life be to advance my cause on earth."

It seems that the price was too great for Mr. Too Slow to pay. He passes off the stage of time into a nameless silence.

If the first man illustrated material comforts as a hindrance to discipleship, the second might speak of a job or an occupation taking precedence over the main reason for a Christian's existence. It is not that there is anything wrong in secular employment; God's will is that man should work in order to provide for his needs and those of his family. But the life of true discipleship demands that the kingdom of God and His righteousness be sought first; that a believer should not spend his life doing what the unregenerate could do as well, if not better; and that the function of a job is merely to provide for current necessities while the main vocation of the Christian is to preach the kingdom of God.

Mr. Too Easy

The third man has been called Mr. Too Easy. He resembled the first in that he volunteered to follow the Lord. But he resembled the second in that he used those contradictory words, "Lord, ...me first..." He said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first bid them farewell, which are at home at my house."

Once again we must admit that, taken by itself, there was nothing basically wrong with his request. It is not contrary to God's law to show a loving interest in one's relatives or to observe the rules of etiquette when leaving them. What then was the point on which this man failed the test? It was this—he allowed the tender ties of nature to supersede the place of Christ.

And so with penetrating insight, the Lord Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In other words, "My disciples are not made of such self-centered, flabby stuff as you have exhibited. I want those who are willing to renounce home ties, who will not be distracted by sentimental relatives, who will put me above everyone else in their lives."

We are forced to conclude that Mr. Too Easy left Jesus and walked sadly down the road. His over-confident aspirations to be a disciple had dashed themselves to pieces on the rocks of congenial family bonds. Perhaps it was a weeping mother who sobbed, "You'll break your mother's heart if you leave me to go to the mission field." We do not know. All we know is that the Bible graciously refrains from giving the name of this faint-hearted fellow who, by turning back, missed the greatest opportunity of his life and earned the epitaph, "Not fit for the kingdom of God."

Summary

These then are three of the primary hindrances to true discipleship, illustrated by three men who were not willing to go all the way with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mr. Too Quick—the love of earthly comforts.

Mr. Too Slow—the precedence of a job or occupation.

Mr. Too Easy—the priority of tender family ties.

The Lord Jesus still calls, as He has ever called, for men and women to follow Him heroically and sacrificially.

The escape routes still present themselves saying with solicitous words, "Spare thyself! Be it far from thee!"

Few are willing to respond.

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee,
Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shalt be,
Perish ev'ry fond ambition,
All I've sought, or hoped, or known,
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heav'n are still my own.

Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Saviour, too;
Human hearts and looks deceive me—

Hindrances To Discipleship

Thou art not, like them, untrue;
Oh! while Thou dost smile upon me,
God of wisdom, love, and might,
Foes may hate, and friends disown me,
Show Thy face, and all is bright.

—H. F. Lyte

How To Walk In The Spirit?

William MacDonald:

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit...” (Gal. 5:16)

Exactly what is involved in walking in the Spirit? Actually it is not as complicated and impractical as some tend to think. Here is what a day’s walk in the Spirit would be like!

First, you start the day in prayer. You confess all known sin in your life; this makes you a clean vessel and therefore usable by God. You spend time in praise and worship; this gets your soul in tune. You turn over control of your life to Him; this makes you available for the Lord to live His life through you. In this act of rededication, you “cease from needless scheming and leave the ruling of your life to Him.”

Next, you spend time feeding on the Word of God. Here you get a general outline of God’s will for your life. And you may also receive some specific indication of His will for you in your present circumstances.

After your quiet time, you do the things that your hands find to do. Ordinarily they will be the prosaic, routine, mundane duties of life. This is where a lot of people have wrong ideas. They think that walking in the Spirit is foreign to the world of aprons and overalls. Actually it is mostly composed of faithfulness and diligence in one’s daily work.

Throughout the day you confess and forsake sin as soon as you are aware of it. You praise the Lord as His blessings come to mind. You obey every impulse to do good, and refuse every temptation to evil.

Then you take what comes to you during the day as being His will for you. Interruptions become opportunities to minister. Disappointments become His appointments. Phone calls, letters, visitors are seen as part of His plan.

Harold Wildish quoted the following summary in one of his books:

“As you leave the whole burden of your sin, and rest upon the finished work of Christ, so leave the whole burden of your life and service, and rest upon the present inworking of the Holy Spirit.”

“Give yourself up, morning by morning, to be led by the Holy Spirit and go forth praising and at rest, leaving Him to manage you and your day. Cultivate the habit all through the day, of joyfully depending upon and obeying Him, expecting Him to guide, to enlighten, to reprove, to teach, to use, and to do in and with you what He wills. Count upon His working as a fact, altogether apart from sight or feeling. Only let us believe in and obey the Holy Spirit as the Ruler of our lives, and cease from the burden of trying to manage ourselves; then shall the fruit of the Spirit appear in us, as He wills, to the glory of God.”

In Him You Have Been Made Complete

William MacDonald:

“...in Him you have been made complete.” (Col. 2:10 NASB)

Contrary to popular opinion, there are no degrees of fitness for heaven. A person is either absolutely fit or he is not fit at all. This goes counter to the common notion that at the top of God’s totem pole are good, clean-living people, at the bottom are the crooks and mobsters, and in between are those with varying degrees of fitness for heaven. It is an enormous mistake. We are either fit or we aren’t. There is nothing in between.

Actually none of us is fit in himself. We are all guilty sinners, deserving eternal punishment. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We have all gone astray and turned to our own way. We are all unclean, and all our best works are like filthy rags.

Not only are we totally unfit for heaven, but there is nothing we can do by ourselves to make us fit. Our best resolutions and noblest endeavors cannot avail to put away our sins or to provide us with the righteousness that God demands. But the good news is that God’s love provides what His righteousness demands, and He provides it as a free gift. “It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast,” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Fitness for heaven is found in Christ. Whenever a sinner is born again, he receives Christ. God no longer sees him as a sinner in the flesh; He sees him in Christ, and accepts him on that basis. God has made Christ to be sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).

So what it comes down to is this. Either we have Christ or we don’t. If we have Christ, we are as fit for heaven as God can make us. Christ’s fitness becomes ours. We are as worthy as He is, because we are in Him.

On the other hand, if we don’t have Christ, we are as lost as we can possibly be. To be without Him is the fatal deficiency. Nothing else can ever make up for this crucial lack.

It should be clear then that no believer is any more fit for heaven than another believer. All believers have the same title to glory. That title is Christ. No believer has more of Christ than another. Therefore none is more fit for heaven than another.

Jesus Died as a Lamb to the Slaughter

William MacDonald:

“...he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” (Isa. 53:7b)

I once saw a lamb die. It was a most moving, most awful sight.

As it was brought to the place of execution, it looked especially lovable. Children would have loved to cuddle it. The young of every species are darling—kittens, puppies, chicks, calves and colts—but a lamb is especially appealing.

As it stood there, it was a picture of innocence. Its white fleece, without blemish, gave the appearance of purity. It was gentle and mild, helpless and defenseless. Its eyes were especially expressive; they spoke of fear, of pathos and poignancy. There seemed to be no reason why anything so young, so beautiful should have to die.

Now the legs were tied and the pathetic lamb was lying on its side, breathing heavily, as if aware of impending death. With one deft motion, the butcher moved the knife across the throat. The blood poured out over the ground. The little body was convulsed by the death throes, then shortly it lay still. The gentle lamb had died.

Some of the spectators had turned away from the sight; it was too sad to watch. Others were wiping away the tears. No one wanted to speak.

By faith I see another Lamb dying—the Lamb of God. It is a most blessed, most awful sight.

This Lamb is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand, the fairest of the fair. As He is brought to the place of execution, He is in the prime of life.

He is not only innocent—He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, without spot and without blemish. There seems no reason why anyone so pure should ever be put to death.

But the executioners take Him and nail Him to the Cross, hands and feet. There He suffers the concentrated torments and horrors of hell as a Substitute for sinners. Through it all His eyes are filled with love and forgiveness.

Now His suffering time is ended. He dismisses His spirit and His body hangs limp on the Cross. A soldier pierces His side and out gushes blood and water. The Lamb of God has died.

My heart is filled. Scalding tears flow freely. I fall to my knees and thank Him and praise Him! Just to think—He died for me! I will never cease to love Him.

Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet

William MacDonald:

“Thou shalt never wash my feet.” (John 13:8)

The Lord Jesus had just girded Himself with a towel and filled a basin with water, preparatory to washing the disciples’ feet. When He came to Peter, He met this emphatic refusal, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

Why? Why didn’t Peter want to submit to this gracious ministry from the Lord? On the one hand, there may have been a sense of unworthiness; he did not consider himself worthy to be served by the Lord. But there is also the real possibility that Peter’s attitude was one of pride and independence. He did not want to be on the receiving end. He did not want to be dependent on others for help.

This same attitude keeps many people from being saved. They want to earn salvation or deserve it, but to receive it as a free gift of grace is beneath their dignity. They don’t want to feel indebted to God. But “no one who is too proud to be infinitely in debt will ever be a Christian” (James S. Stewart).

There is also a lesson here for those who are already Christians. We have all met believers who are compulsive givers. They are always doing for others. Their lives are poured out in service for their relatives and neighbors. Their generosity deserves high praise. But there is a fly in the ointment! They never want to be on the receiving end. They never want anyone to do anything for them. They have learned how to give generously but they have never learned how to receive graciously. They enjoy the blessing of ministering to others, but they deny to others that same blessing.

Paul proved himself to be a gracious recipient of gifts from the Philippians. In thanking them, he said, “Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account” (Phil. 4:17). He thought of their reward more than of his own need.

“It is told of Bishop Westcott that at the end of his life he said he had made one great mistake, for, while he had always been willing to do for others to the limit of his ability, he had never been willing to let others do for him, and as a result some element of sweetness and completeness was missing. He had not allowed himself the discipline of receiving many kindnesses which could not be repaid” (J. O. Sanders).

An unknown poet summed it up well when he wrote:

J hold him great, who, for love’s sake,
Can give with generous, earnest will;
But he who takes for love’s sweet sake,
I think I hold more generous still.

William MacDonald:

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

Commandments? In the New Testament? Whenever people hear the word commandments, they immediately think legalism. But the two words are not synonymous. No one spoke more of commandments than the Lord Jesus, yet no one was less legalistic than He.

What is legalism? Though the word itself is not found in the New Testament, it describes man's ceaseless effort to earn or deserve God's favor. Basically it signifies the attempt to gain justification or sanctification by lawkeeping. That is its real meaning.

But today the word is used in a wider sense to describe what are thought of as rigid, moralistic rules. Any attempt to classify certain practices as taboo is “legalistic.” In fact, the word “legalism” is now used as a handy club to beat back almost any restraints on Christian behavior or any negatives.

How, then, should a Christian think in order to avoid the danger associated with “legalism”?

First of all, it is true that a Christian is free from the law, but it is important to add quickly that he is not lawless. He is enlawed to Christ. He shouldn't do as he pleases but as Christ pleases.

Secondly, it must be remembered that the New Testament is filled with commandments, including a fair number of negatives. The difference is that these commandments are not given as law, with penalty attached. They are given as instructions in righteousness for the people of God.

Next, things may be lawful for a Christian but they may not be profitable. They may be lawful but they may also be enslaving (1 Cor. 6:12 NASB).

It is possible that a believer may have liberty to do something and yet he might stumble someone else in doing it. In that case he shouldn't do it.

Just because someone dubs a prohibition as “legalistic” doesn't mean it is bad. People also use the word “puritanical” to denounce certain codes of conduct, but the behavior of the Puritans was more Christ-honoring than that of many who criticize them.

Very often when Christians castigate accepted patterns of godly behavior as “legalism,” it may be a sign that they themselves are becoming more permissive and are drifting from their moral moorings. They naively imagine that by throwing mud at so-called legalists or Puritans, they themselves will look better.

Our safety lies in staying as close to the teachings of Scripture as possible, not in trying to see how close we can get to the edge of the precipice.

Learning in the Darkness

William MacDonald:

"And I will girt thee the treasures of darkness." Isaiah 45:3

When God made this promise to Cyrus, He was speaking of material treasures from lands of darkness that Cyrus would conquer. But we are not doing violence to the verse when we take it and apply it in a spiritual sense.

There are treasures that are discovered in the dark nights of life that are never found in days of unrelieved sunshine.

For instance, God can give songs in the darkest night (Job 35:10) that would never have been sung if life were completely devoid of trials. That is why the poet wrote:

And many a rapturous minstrel among
those sons of Light
Will say of his sweetest music "I
learned it in the night;"
And many a rolling anthem that fills
the Father's home
Sobbed out its first rehearsal in the
shade of a darkened room.

There is the darkness of what J. Stuart Holden calls "life's inexplicable mysteries - the calamities, the catastrophes, the sudden and unexpected experiences which have come into life, and which all our forethought has not been sufficient to ward off; and life is dark because of them - sorrow, loss, disappointment, injustice, misconception of motive, slander." These are often the things that make life dark.

Humanly speaking, none of us would choose this darkness, and yet its benefits are incalculable. Leslie Weatherhead wrote, "Like all men, I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience, when health, happiness and success abound, but I have teamed far more about God and life and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine. There are such things as the treasures of darkness. The darkness, thank God, passes. But what one learns in the darkness, one possesses for ever."

Mourning Over The Past

William MacDonald:

"How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel." 1 Samuel 16:1

There comes a time in life when we must stop mourning over the past and get on with the work of the present.

God had rejected Saul from being king. The action was final, irreversible. But Samuel had difficulty in accepting it. He had been closely associated with Saul and he now wept to see his hopes disappointed. He continued to mourn a loss that would never be retrieved. God said, in effect, "Quit mourning. Go out and anoint Saul's successor. My program has not failed. I have a better man than Saul to step onto the stage of Israel's history."

We would like to think that Samuel not only learned the lesson for himself but that he passed it on to David, who took Saul's place as king. At any rate, David showed that he had learned the lesson well. As long as his baby was dying, he fasted and mourned, hoping that God would spare the child. But when the infant died, he bathed, changed his clothes, went to the Tabernacle to worship, then ate a meal. To those who questioned his realism, he said, "Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23).

This has a voice for us in our Christian life and service. Sometime it may happen that a ministry might be wrenched away from us and given to someone else. We grieve over the death of an avenue of service.

It may be that a friendship or a partnership is severed, and that, as a result, life seems empty and flat. Or that we have been cruelly disappointed by someone who was very dear to us. We mourn the death of a valued relationship.

Or it may be that some lifelong dream is shattered or some ambition is frustrated. We mourn the death of a noble aspiration or vision.

There is nothing wrong about mourning, but it should not be prolonged to the extent that it cripples our effectiveness in meeting the challenges of the hour. E. Stanley Jones said he made it a point to "recover within the hour" from the grief and blows of life. An hour may not be long enough for most of us, but we must not be forever inconsolable over circumstances that cannot be changed.

No Man To Teach You

William MacDonald:

“...ye need not that any man teach you.” (1 John 2:27)

At first glance this verse poses problems. If we don’t need anyone to teach us, why did the risen Lord give teachers to build up the saints for the work of ministering (Eph. 4:11, 12)?

In order to understand John’s meaning, it helps to know the background of his letter. At the time he wrote, the church was being plagued by false teachers known as Gnostics. These heretics had once professed to be sincere believers in the Lord Jesus and had been in the fellowship of local assemblies. But then they had left to push their false views concerning the humanity and deity of Christ.

They professed to have superior knowledge, hence the name Gnostic, from the Greek word *gnosis*—“to know.” They probably said something like this to the Christians: “What you have is good, but we have additional truth. We can take you beyond the simple teachings and initiate you into new and deeper mysteries. If you are going to be full-grown and fulfilled, you need our teachings.”

But John warns the Christians that it is all a hoax. They don’t need any of these imposters to teach them. They have the Holy Spirit. They have the Word of Truth. And they have God-ordained teachers. The Holy Spirit enables them to discern between truth and error. The Christian faith has been once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and anything that claims to be in addition to it is fraudulent. Christian teachers are needed to explain and apply the Scriptures, but they must never transgress by going beyond the Scriptures.

John would be the last one to deny the need for teachers in the Church. He himself was a teacher par excellence. But he would be the first one to insist that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate authority, and that He leads His people into all truth through the pages of Holy Writ. All teaching must be tested by the Bible. If it professes to be in addition to the Bible, if it claims equal authority with the Bible, or if it does not agree with the Bible, then it must be rejected.

Obedying the Instruction of the Older

William MacDonald:

“Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.” (Prov. 4:1)

In the first four verses of Proverbs 4, Solomon describes how good advice can and should be passed down from one generation to another. He tells how his father had taught him, then urges his son, in turn, to pay attention to good doctrine and sound instruction.

It is sensible for young people to learn as much as possible from their earthly parents concerning the practical affairs of life. But it is also true that, in the spiritual sphere, every young Christian should have a spiritual mentor—someone to whom he can go with his questions, someone in whom he can confide, someone who will share from a rich store of experience and someone who will be candid in dealing with areas of need. If a parent can fill this role, all the better. But if not, someone else should be sought out.

Godly, mature believers have accumulated a vast amount of practical knowledge. No doubt they have experienced defeats, but they have learned valuable lessons from them and have learned how to avoid them the next time. Older Christians can often see aspects of a problem that young people might miss. And they have learned to be balanced and to avoid unreasonable extremes.

A wise young Timothy will cultivate a Paul, trying to draw on his wisdom and know-how. He will save himself from humiliations and blunders by checking first with someone who has been through it before him. Instead of treating old age with contempt, he will honor those who have fought in the conflict and have maintained a good record.

Generally speaking, older saints will not push themselves on the young. They know that no advice is as unwelcome as advice that is unsolicited. But, when asked, they are always glad to share insights that have been of help to them along the way.

So whether a young person is having a struggle with lust, or wants to know how to find God’s guidance, or seeks to raise a family for the Lord, or wonders if God is calling him to the mission field, or needs help in managing his finances, or longs for a more effective prayer life—he would be wise to seek the help of a spiritual guide who can bring the light of Scripture to shine on the particular problem. Underneath those gray hairs there is often a fund of wisdom to be tapped. Why learn the hard way when you can profit from the insights and past experience of others?

William MacDonald:

THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS

The seventh and final truth concerning the Church which we listed at the outset was that all believers are priests of God. Every local assembly should witness to this truth practically by refusing any other priesthood and by encouraging every believer to exercise the privileges and responsibilities of this sacred office, both individually and collectively.

1. A Contrast

In the old Testament, the law of Moses set aside the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron to be the priests of the nation. These men had distinctive dress, were given special privileges, and stood as a separate caste between God and the congregation of Israel. They alone could enter the holy place, and only they could offer the sacrifices prescribed by the law.

In Christianity all this changed. Now all believers are priests, according to the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:5 states, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Revelation 1: 5, 6 declares, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Martin Luther earnestly contended for the truth of the priesthood of all believers. He wrote: "All believers are altogether priests, and let it be anathema to assert that there is any other priest than he who is Christian; for it will be asserted without the Word of God, on no authority but the sayings of men, or the antiquity of custom, or the multitude of those that think so."

2. Our Sacrifices

Among the important duties of a priest is that of offering sacrifice. In the old Testament the sacrifices usually consisted of slain animals. Today, a believer offers the sacrifice of his body (Romans 12:1). This is not a dead offering, but "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." He also offers his material resources (Hebrews 13:16). "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Then, too, there is the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto His Name." This sacrifice of praise should be both individual and collective. The latter-collective worship-in which believers are at liberty to take part in public praise has been practically eliminated by the stereotyped, controlled services of our day. The result is a generation of silent priests in the gatherings of God's people.

3. Other Priestly Duties

Other duties of a priest include prayer, testimony for God, and care for His people. Thus, believers should continually be exercising this sacred office. Eric Sauer says: "The teaching of all Scripture on this subject (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18; John 16: 13), makes clear that it has to be applied to our whole life from morning till evening, and every day in the week, not only the Lord's Day. It is certainly not limited to the beginning and ending of church gatherings, such as meetings for worship, Bible reading, or prayer, but includes the whole man, not only in but also outside the meeting-rooms, halls, chapels, and church buildings. In this full sense of the word the whole New Testament people of God is 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5-9).

4. Our Great High Priest

Although it is true that all believers are priests, it is also true that every Christian needs a priest. He finds that

need fully met in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews sets forth that blessed One as the Great High Priest, One who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities because He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

5. What Christendom Has Done

Every local church then should recognize the Lord Jesus as the Great High Priest, and every believer as a holy and royal priest. But is this what we find in Christendom today? On the contrary, we find that the Church has gone back to the priestly system of Judaism. While professing to believe in the priesthood of all Christians, many churches have set up a distinct priesthood of their own, based largely on the Mosaic system. Thus we have a separate class of men set apart for divine service, a hierarchy of church officials with high-sounding titles that distinguish them from the laity, and distinctive garb to set these men apart as being of a different order. In addition, the church has borrowed from Judaism such concepts as consecrated buildings with their elaborate altars, ecclesiastical adornments, and material aids to worship, an impressive ritual that appeals to the natural senses, and a religious calendar with its holy days and seasons.

Concerning this mixture of Judaism and Christianity, Dr. C. I. Scofield commented: "It may safely be said that the Judaizing of the church has done more to hinder her progress, pervert her mission, and destroy her spirituality, than all other causes combined. Instead of pursuing her appointed path of separation from the world and following the Lord in her heavenly calling, she has used Jewish Scriptures to justify herself in lowering her purpose to the civilization of the world, the acquisition of wealth, the use of an imposing ritual, the erection of magnificent churches, the invocation of God's blessing upon the conflicts of armies, and the division of an equal brotherhood into 'clergy, and 'laity.'

6. What Should Be Done?

Is not God calling upon His people today to-separate themselves from this religion of types and shadows, in order that they might find their sufficiency in the Name of the Lord Jesus?

Only such a church is fully realizing its share in the New Testament general priesthood which is, to quote Erich Sauer, "A local church with Spirit-filled, regularly well-attended prayer meetings;

"A local church with members who are practical helpers and fellow-workers with the Lord's servants in the world-wide harvest field;

"A local church with persevering, energetic activity in the preaching of the Gospel, by tract distribution, personal witness, and, wherever possible, open-air meetings;

"A local church with a warm-hearted, spiritual atmosphere of love, where everyone tries to help the other by mutual care and charity in a prayerful spirit, considering one another to provoke unto love and good works.

"In such a local church the gatherings and services also will be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as distributed by the Lord Himself, will be developed in their God-appointed variety, in brotherly fellowship, in dependence upon Christ, and thus in holy freedom of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 14:26). And when the church is gathered together at the Lord's Table praising the priestly sacrifice on Golgotha, priestly worship will rise up to the heavenly Sanctuary, thus crowning the privilege of the general priesthood of the church."

7. Looking Ahead

With this section on priesthood, we bring to a close our study of seven vital truths concerning the universal Church which every local church should seek to portray and practice. Needless to say, other truths could be mentioned, but these are sufficient to show that the assembly should be a replica or miniature of all that is true of the entire body of Christ. In the pages to follow we shall deal with the ordinances of the church, the prayer meeting, the bishops and deacons, the finances of the church, and the ministry of women. There will be a concluding lesson entitled, "Let Us Go Forth Unto Him!"

BAPTISM

The two ordinances of the Christian Church are baptism and the Lord's Supper. We find these instituted in the Gospels (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19, 20); practiced in the Acts (Chapter 10:47, 48; 20:7); and expounded in the Epistles (Romans 6:3-10; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

1. Three Baptisms

In considering the subject of baptism, we should notice at the outset that there are three main forms of baptism in the New Testament.

First of all, there is the baptism of John (Mark 1:4). As the forerunner of the coming King, John called upon the nation of Israel to repent and to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8). Those who came to him, confessing their sins, were baptized unto repentance, and they thus separated themselves from the ungodly condition of the nation. The Lord Jesus was baptized by John, not because He had sins of which to repent, but in order to identify Himself with the repentant remnant of Israel, and fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

Secondly, there is believer's baptism (Romans 6:3, 4). This signifies identification with Christ in His death, and will be discussed in detail later.

Thirdly, there is the baptism in the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is that act of God whereby all believers are baptized in one Spirit into the body of Christ.

2. Significant Contrasts

In connection with these three baptisms, it should be carefully noted that John's baptism is not the same as Spirit baptism. These are clearly distinguished in Matthew 3:11. John's baptism is not the same as believer's baptism. Acts 19:1-5 shows that those who were already baptized as John's disciples were re-baptized with Christian baptism. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not the same as believer's baptism. Many have a vague idea that water baptism is a picture or portrayal of Spirit baptism. Actually they are entirely distinct. Spirit baptism speaks of incorporation into Christ's body, whereas believer's baptism is a type of death. In short, all these three forms of baptism are different, and should not be confused.

3. Believer's Baptism

There is no mention in the New Testament, after the day of Pentecost, of any persons being baptized except those who were believers in the Lord Jesus. Note the following—“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized,” (Acts 2:41). “When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). It is true that households are mentioned as being baptized (Acts 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16); but there is no evidence to suppose that these households included anyone, young or old, who had never trusted the Lord Jesus.

4. The Significance of It

The principal meaning of believer's baptism is most fully developed in Romans 6:1-10. We might summarize the teaching of that passage as follows. When Jesus died, He went, as it were, under the waves and billows of God's wrath (Psalm 42:7). He did this as our Representative. Because Christ really died in our place, we can say that when He died, we died. By dying, He settled the whole question of sin once and for all. Therefore, we too have died to the whole question of sin. Sin no longer has any claim on us. God sees every believer as having been crucified with Christ. All that he- was as a sinner in the flesh has been nailed to the cross. In baptism, the believer gives a dramatic illustration of what has already taken place. In going under the water, he is saying in effect, “Because of my sins, I deserved to die. But when Jesus died, I died too. My old man, or old self, was crucified with Him. When Jesus was buried, I too was buried, and I now acknowledge that my old self should be put away from God's sight forever as a matter of daily practice.” Then just as Jesus arose from the dead, so the believer arises out of the waters of baptism. In so doing, he signifies his determination to walk in newness of life. No longer will he live to please self, but rather he will turn over his life to the Savior so that He can live His life in the believer.

Thus we might say that baptism is an ordinance signifying the end of the former way of life. It is a public act of obedience to the will of the Lord (Matthew 28 :19, 20), picturing the believer's death with Christ. It has no saving merit, but is for those who are already saved.

5. The Method

Endless controversy has arisen over the question as to how baptism should be administered -whether by sprinkling or by immersion. The following facts are helpful in seeking a solution. The word "baptize" comes from a Greek word meaning "to dip, plunge, wash." In connection with the baptism of Christ, we read, "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water," (Matthew 3:16). John himself was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, "because there was much water there" (John 3:23). At the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, the Scripture is careful in noting that "they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip . . ." (Acts 8:38, 39). We saw above (Romans 6:3) that baptism is a likeness or picture of burial. Sprinkling does not convey any likeness of burial, whereas immersion does so most accurately.

6. The Important Thing

But even more important than the mode of baptism is the heart condition of the person being baptized. There are thousands of persons who have been immersed in water, but who have not been really baptized. The truly baptized person is the one who has not only gone through the outward ordinance, but whose life shows that the flesh, or old nature, has been put in the place of death. Baptism must be a matter of the heart, as well as an outward profession.

This may be expressed rather pointedly by paraphrasing Romans 2:25-29 to refer to baptism instead of circumcision.

"Baptism indeed profiteth if thou be an obeyer of the Gospel; but if thou be a refuser of a Gospel-walk, then baptism is become non-baptism. If therefore, an un-baptized person obeys the Gospel, shall not his non-baptism be reckoned for baptism? And shall not un-baptized persons, if they obey the Gospel, judge thee, who with the letter and baptism, art a refuser of a Gospel-walk. For he is not a Christian who is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God."

7. Administering the Rite

The idea that a man must be an ordained minister in order to baptize is unscriptural. Any man who is a believer may baptize others.

COUNTING THE COST

In the early days of the church, when a believer was baptized, he was often persecuted and murdered in a short time. Yet whenever others were saved, they unhesitatingly stepped forward to fill up the ranks of the martyrs by being baptized.

Even today in certain areas, baptism is often the signal for the beginning of terrible persecution. In many countries, a believer is tolerated as long as he only confesses Christ with his lips. But whenever he publicly confesses Christ in baptism and severs his ties with the past, the enemies of the cross take up their battle against him. Yet whatever the cost may be, each one who is baptized enjoys the same experience as the Ethiopian eunuch, of whom it is written, "He went on his way rejoicing."

Owe No Man Anything

William MacDonald:

“Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” (Rom. 13:8)

We need not take this verse as a prohibition against any and every kind of debt. In our society we cannot escape telephone bills, gas and light bills, and water bills. Also under certain circumstances, it may be better discipleship to buy a house on a mortgage, thus building up equity, than to pay out the same monthly amount in rent. And it is impossible to run a business today without contracting some debts.

But the verse certainly does forbid other practices. It forbids going into debt when there is slim chance to repay. It forbids borrowing to purchase a product that depreciates in value. It forbids getting into arrears. It forbids going into debt for nonessentials. It forbids plunging into debt over our heads, the temptation to overspend on impulse because we have credit cards. It forbids wasting the Lord’s money by paying exorbitant interest charges on the unpaid balance.

The verse is designed to save us from dunning creditors, from marital problems caused by overspending, and from bankruptcy court, all of which are devastating to the Christian testimony.

In general, we should practice financial responsibility by living modestly and within our means, always remembering that the borrower is slave to the lender (see Prov. 22:7).

The one debt that is always in order for the Christian is the obligation to love one another. We are obligated to love the unconverted and to share the Gospel with them (Rom. 1:14). We are obligated to love the brethren and to lay down our lives for them (1 John 3:16). This kind of indebtedness will never get us in trouble with the law. Rather, as Paul says, it is the fulfilling of the law.

William MacDonald:

The only completely satisfactory book that has ever been written on the subject of prayer is the Bible. All other treatments leave us with a feeling that there are depths that have not been reached and heights that have not been scaled. In this booklet, we cannot hope to improve on the efforts of others. All we can do is to summarize some of the important principles of prayer, especially as they have to do with the subject of Christian discipleship.

1. The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity. We have all proved this to be true. When our lives are serene and placid, our prayers are apt to be dull and listless. When we reach a crisis, a moment of danger, a serious illness, or a heavy bereavement, then our prayers are fervent and vital. Someone has said that "the arrow that is to enter heaven must be launched from a bow fully bent." A sense of urgency, of helplessness, of conscious need is the womb from which the best prayers are born.

Unfortunately, we spend most of our lives trying to cushion ourselves from necessities. By the use of clever business methods, we provide comfortable reserves against every imaginable contingency. Through sheer human cleverness, we reach the stage where we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Then we wonder why our prayer life is shallow and lifeless and why no fire falls from heaven. If we truly walked by faith instead of by sight, then our prayer life would be revolutionized.

2. One of the conditions of successful prayer is that we must "draw near with a true heart" (Hebrews 10:22). This means that we must be genuine and sincere before the Lord. There must be no hypocrisy. If we are to meet this condition, then we will never ask God to do something when we have it in our own power to do it. For instance, we will never ask Him to raise up a certain amount of money for a Christian project if we ourselves have surplus funds that could be used in this way. God is not mocked. He does not answer prayers if He has already given us the answer, and we are not willing to use it.

In the same connection, we should not pray for the Lord to send others on His errands if we are not willing to go ourselves. Thousands of prayers have been uttered in behalf of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. But if all who prayed had been willing to be used of the Lord in reaching these people, then perhaps the history of Christian missions would have been more encouraging.

3. Prayer should be simple, believing and unquestioning. It is all too possible to become absorbed with the theological problems connected with prayer. This serves only to dull the spiritual senses. It is better to pray than to solve all the mysteries connected with prayer. Let the doctors of divinity spin their theories concerning prayer. But let the simple believer storm the gates of heaven with childlike trust. It was Augustine who said, "The unlearned take heaven by force, and we with all our learning rise not above flesh and blood."

I know not by what methods rare,
But this I know—God answers prayer.

I know not when He sends the word
That tells us fervent prayer is heard;

I know it cometh soon or late,
Therefore we need to pray and wait.

I know not if the blessing sought
Will come in just the guise I thought.

I leave my prayers with Him alone,
Whose will is wiser than my own.

—Lola C. Henson

4. For true power in prayer, hold nothing back. Be surrendered to Christ. Go all out for Him. Forsake all to follow the Savior. The type of devotion that crowns Christ Lord of all is the kind that He loves to honor.

5. God seems to place a special value on prayer when it costs us something. Those who rise early in the morning enjoy fellowship with the One Who likewise arose early to receive His instructions for the day from His

Father. Likewise, those who are in such deadly earnest that they are willing to pray through the night enjoy a power with God that cannot be denied. Prayer that costs nothing is worth nothing; it is simply a by-product of a cheap Christianity.

The New Testament often links prayer with fasting. Abstinence from food can be a valuable aid in spiritual exercises. From the human side, it promotes clarity, concentration and keenness. From the divine standpoint, it seems that the Lord is especially willing to answer prayer when we put that prayer before our necessary food.

6. Avoid selfish prayers. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). The primary burden of our prayers should be the interests of the Lord. First we should pray, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Then we may add, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

7. We should honor God with great requests because He is a great God. “Let us have faith to expect great things from God.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring
For His love and power are such
Thou canst never ask too much.

—John Newton

How often have we grieved the Lord by expecting so little of Him. We have been content with such scanty triumphs, with such poor attainments, with such feeble longings after higher things, that we have not impressed those around us with the thought that our God is a great God. We have not glorified Him in the eyes of men who know Him not by lives that arrested attention and awakened inquiry as to the power by which they were sustained. Too often it has not been said of us, as was said of the apostle, “They glorified God in me.” —E. W. Moore.

8. In praying, we should first make sure we are in the will of God. Then we should pray, believing that He will hear and answer. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14, 15).

To pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus means to pray in His will. When we truly pray in His Name, it is the same as if He were actually uttering the request to God, His Father. “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13, 14). “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23). “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19, 20). “To ask, ‘In His Name,’ means to be taken by the hand and led to prayer by Him; it means, may I say, His kneeling by our side and His desires flowing through our heart. That is what it means. ‘In His Name.’ His Name is what He is, His nature, and therefore to pray in the Name of Christ must mean to pray according to His blessed will. Can I pray for evil in the Name of the Son of God? What I pray for should really be an expression of His nature. Can I do that in prayer? Prayer should breathe the power of the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ, the desires of Christ in us and for us. The Lord teach us more and more to pray in His Name. We should not think of closing a prayer, without the very words: ‘In the blessed Name of our Lord,’ but then the whole supplication should be infiltrated by, permeated by the blessed Name of Jesus—all according to that Name.” —Samuel Ridout.

9. If our prayer life is to be truly effective, we must keep short accounts with God. By that, we mean that sin must be confessed and forsaken as soon as we are conscious it has entered into our lives. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18). We must abide in Christ. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). The person who abides in Christ stays so close to Him that he is filled with a knowledge of the Lord’s will. He can thus pray intelligently and be assured of answers. Again, the abiding life demands that we obey His commandments. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22). A right state of soul is necessary if our prayers are to be heard and answered (1 John 3:20).

10. We should not only pray at certain stated times during the day; we should develop the attitude of prayer, so that we look to the Lord as we are walking along the street, driving in a car, working at a desk, or serving in the home. Nehemiah is a classic example of this spontaneous type of prayer (Nehemiah 2:4b). It is a good thing to “dwell in the secret place of the most High” instead of making occasional visits there.

11. Finally, our prayers should be specific. It is only as we pray for definite matters that we can see definite answers.

Prayer is a marvelous privilege. By this means, we can, as Hudson Taylor said, learn to move man through God. “What ministries are in our hands for working miracles in the wonder realm of prayer! We can take sunshine into cold and sullen places. We can light the lamp of hope in the prison-house of despondency. We can loose the chains from the prisoner’s limbs. We can take gleams and thoughts of home into the far country. We can carry heavenly cordials to the spiritually faint, even though they are laboring beyond the seas. Miracles in response to prayer!”—J. H. Jowett.

To this, a writer named Wenham adds his testimony: “Preaching is a rare gift; prayer is a rarer one. Preaching, like a sword, is a weapon to use at close quarters; those far off cannot be reached by it. Prayer, like a breechloader, has longer range, and under some circumstances is even more effective.”

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make,
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,
What parched grounds refresh, as with a shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all the distant and the near
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;
We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne with care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy, and strength, and courage are with Thee?

—Trench

Remaining True to the Lord

William MacDonald:

“...he began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord.” (Acts 11:23 NASB)

There is an alarming tendency in some Christian circles to fawn over men because they are scholars, even though they are disloyal to the Person of Christ.

Here is a man, for instance, who is a brilliant writer, a master in the use of illustrations, a commentator whose word studies are superb. But this man denies the Virgin Birth. He explains away the miracles of our Lord. He rejects the literal, bodily resurrection of the Savior. He speaks patronizingly of Jesus as one who must find a place in any gallery of the world’s heroes. To him, Jesus is just one among many heroes. What this amounts to, of course, is damning the Son of God with faint praise. This man is simply not true to the Lord.

It is shocking, then, to find Christians defending a man like this for his brilliant scholarship. With mealy mouth, they extol his intellectual prowess and pass lightly over his heretical treatment of Christ. They like to quote him as a respected authority and to move in the same scholarly circles. If challenged for fraternizing with one who is an enemy of the Cross of Christ, they use weasel words to play down the seriousness of the offense. Not uncommonly, they attack fundamental, Bible-believing Christians for daring to speak out against one who is such an acknowledged authority.

It is time that Christians recapture a sense of righteous anger when their Savior is being betrayed in the halls of scholarship. This is no time for compromise. The truth concerning His Person and work is not negotiable. We must stand and be counted.

The prophets did not speak equivocally when the truth of God was at stake. They were fiercely loyal to the Lord and lashed out at those who dared to deny or belittle Him.

The apostles too bristled at any effort to rob the Lord of His glory. They chose loyalty to Christ over renown in the theological world.

The martyrs chose to die rather than compromise their loyalty to the Son of God. They were more interested in God’s approval than man’s.

Our responsibility is to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in all things, and to take an adversary relationship to anyone or anything that fails to give Him His proper place of preeminence.

William MacDonald:

“For now we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12)

At few times in our Christian experience is this so evident as when we come to the Lord’s Table to remember Him in His death for us. “We see through a glass, darkly.”

There seems to be a thick, impenetrable veil. We are on one side of it with all our finite limitations. On the other side is the whole great drama of our redemption—Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Gabbatha, Calvary, the empty tomb, the exalted Christ at God’s right hand. We realize that there is something enormously vast there, and we try to take it in, but feel more like clods than like living beings.

We try to comprehend the Savior’s sufferings for our sins. Our minds strain to take in the horror of His being forsaken by God. We know that He endured the torment that we should have endured for all eternity. Yet we are frustrated to realize that there is so much more beyond. We are standing at the edge of an unexplored sea!

We think of the love that sent Heaven’s best for earth’s worst. We are moved when we remember that God sent His only-begotten Son into this jungle of sin to seek and to save that which was lost. But we are dealing with a love that passes knowledge. We can know only in part.

We sing of the grace of the Savior, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. It is enough to make angels gasp. Our eyes strain to see the vast dimensions of such grace. But it is in vain. We are limited by our human shortsightedness.

We know that we should be overcome by the contemplation of His sacrifice at Calvary, but we are too often strangely unmoved. If we really entered in to what lies beyond the veil, we would be reduced to tears. Yet we have to confess...

Oh, wonder to myself I am,
Thou loving, bleeding, dying Lamb,
That I can scan the mystery o’er
And not be moved to love thee more.

Or, in the words of another, we must ask:

Am I a stone, and not a man, that I can stand
O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
And number drop by drop,
Thy blood’s slow loss,
And yet not weep?

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, our eyes are beholden. We long with burning desire for the time when the veil will be removed and when we will see with better vision the awesome meaning of the broken bread and the outpoured wine.

Seeing Our Imperfections

William MacDonald:

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful.” (Prov. 14:13)

Nothing is perfect in this life. All laughter is mingled with sorrow. Every diamond has a flaw. Each person has some character defect. In all of life, there’s a worm in the apple.

It is good to be idealistic; God has set within us a longing for perfection. But it is also good to be realistic; we never will find absolute perfection under the sun.

It is easy for young people to think that their family is the only one that has quarrels. Or that their parents are the only ones who don’t have scintillating TV personalities.

It is easy to be disappointed with our local church fellowship, all the time supposing that everything is rosy in the church across the street.

Or it is easy to go through life forever looking for friends who are absolutely ideal. We expect perfection in others even though we can’t produce it ourselves.

We should face the fact squarely that everyone has personality flaws, some more glaring than others. Often the more outstanding a person is, the more obvious his faults are. Instead of being disappointed with the flaws, we would do well to emphasize the good qualities in other believers. Everyone has some of these too. But only one Person has all of them combined, that is, the Lord Jesus.

I often think that the Lord has purposely left us with an unsatisfied desire for Perfection down here so that we will look off to Him in whom there is neither spot nor blemish. He represents the sum of all moral beauties. There is no disappointment in Him.

William MacDonald:

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17)

Today’s English Version translates the first part of this verse, “Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know...” It is a wonderful promise that if a person sincerely desires to know, God will show him.

When a sinner has come to the end of himself and when he prays in deep extremity, “Oh God, reveal Yourself to me,” God always does. It is a prayer that never goes unanswered.

A hippie, living in a cave in the Southwest, was ready to end it all. He had sought satisfaction in liquor, drugs, sex, and the occult. But still his life was empty, empty, empty. He could see no way out of his misery. Huddled in the cave one day, he cried out, “Oh God—if there is a God—reveal yourself to me, or I’m going to end my life.”

Within ten minutes, a young Christian, who “just happened” to be passing, stuck his head in the mouth of the cave, saw the hermit-hippie and said, “Hi, mind if I speak to you about Jesus?”

You know what happened! The hippie listened to the good news of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to the Savior and found forgiveness, acceptance and new life. He had prayed out of the depths; God heard and answered. I have never heard of anyone who prayed like that without having a special revelation of the Lord to his soul.

Of course, the promise is true to Christians as well. If a man sincerely desires to know what the will of God for his life is, God will show it to him. If he wants to know the proper pathway as far as church fellowship is concerned, God will make it known. No matter what the need may be, God is committed to meet it, if we want His will supremely. The thing that stands between us and a true knowledge of God’s mind is our own lack of desperate desire.

“...by love serve one another.” (Gal. 5:13)

Someone has said, “Self thinks itself great and is served. Love serves and is great.”

A popular Gospel singer witnessed to the man sitting next to him in a restaurant and had the joy of leading him to Christ. In the weeks that followed, he discipled this new convert. Then Fred, the new believer, was stricken with inoperable cancer and was taken to a convalescent hospital where, unfortunately, care was below standard. The Gospel singer, a radio celebrity, visited faithfully, changed the bed, bathed and fed his "Timothy", and did many other things that the staff should have been doing. On the night Fred died, this well-known singer was holding him in his arms, whispering comforting verses of Scripture into his ear. "Â...by love serve one another."

A senior instructor at a Bible School often found the men's room awash after the morning rush. He would patiently clean the fixtures, then get down and wipe the floor dry. Not all his best teaching was done in the classroom. The students were humbled and inspired by the example of their respected teacher cleaning up after them. "âby love serve one another."

In that same Bible School, a member of the basketball team had the heart of a true servant. After a game, when all the players would rush down to be first in the showers, he would stay in the gym and see that it was set in order for the next day. He “found in the selfishness of others an opportunity to identify himself afresh with the Lord as the servant of all.” “...by love serve one another.”

A Christian mother from rural Turkey was taken to London to donate a kidney for her ailing son. She assumed that to give a kidney would cost her life. When the English doctor asked if she was sure she was willing to give a kidney to her son, she replied, "I am willing to give two kidneys." "...by love serve one another."

In a world dominated largely by self-interest, the pathway of selfless, sacrificial service is not overcrowded. Opportunities beckon throughout every day for innovative acts of servanthood.

Sin Begins in the Mind

William MacDonald:

“...as (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7)

A. P. Gibbs used to say, “You are not what you think you are, but what you think—this is what you are.” This means that the mind is the spring from which behavior flows. Control the source and you control the stream that flows from it.

Therefore control of the thought-life is basic. That is why Solomon said, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23) Here the heart is used as a synonym for the mind.

James reminds us that sin begins in the mind (Jas. 1:13-15). If we think about a thing long enough, eventually we’ll do it.

Sow a thought and reap an act.
Sow an act and reap a habit.
Sow a habit and reap a character.
Sow a character and reap a destiny.

The Lord Jesus emphasized the importance of the thought-life by equating hatred with murder (Mt. 5:21, 22) and by equating the lustful look with adultery (Mt. 5:28). He also taught that it’s not what a man eats that defiles him but what he thinks (Mk. 7:14-23).

We are responsible for what we think because we have the power to control it. We can think about lewd, suggestive things or we can think about what is pure and Christlike. Each one of us is like a king. The empire that we rule over is our thought-life. That empire has tremendous potential for good and enormous potential for evil. We are the ones who determine which it will be.

Here are some positive suggestions as to what we can do. First, take the whole matter to the Lord in prayer, saying “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa. 51:10). Second, judge every thought by how it appears in the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Third, confess every evil thought instantly and expel it (Prov. 28:13). Next, avoid having a blank, empty mind. Fill it with positive, worthy thoughts (Phil. 4:8). Fifth, exercise discipline over what you read, see, and hear. You cannot expect a pure thought life if you feed on filth and pollution. Finally, keep busy for the Lord. It’s when you shift your mind into neutral that vile fantasies seek admission.

Taking Our Place - The Ministry of Women

William MacDonald:

Definite instructions are given in the New Testament concerning the position and service of women in the church. We shall now summarize these instructions.

1. The Primary Matter

With regard to such matters as salvation or acceptance before God, woman is on an equality with man. “There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). This does not mean, however, that differences of sex are abolished in the church. When dealing with matters of everyday life, the Scriptures distinguish between male and female. For instance, in Ephesians 5 we have the admonitions: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands” (v. 22); “Husbands, love your wives” (v. 25). Therefore, we may say that as far as her standing before God is concerned, woman is treated exactly the same as man; but that as far as her position in the church is concerned, a distinction is made. The distinction, in brief, is that woman should be in subjection to the man (1 Corinthians 11:3).

2. Accentuating the Negative

Specifically, the following injunctions are laid down in the Word in order to define the various ways in which the subjection of the woman is to be manifested. She must remain silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35). What is meant by “remaining silent” is further explained. She is not permitted to teach (1 Timothy 2: 12). She should not ask questions publicly (1 Corinthians 14:35). She should learn in silence with all subjection (1 Timothy 2:11). She must not usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12). She must not pray or prophesy with her head uncovered (1 Corinthians 11:5). That this does not permit women praying publicly in the church, however, is strongly implied in 1 Timothy 2:8, “I will therefore that men pray every where.” Here the word used for “men” means “males” in contrast to “females.” The Greek word employed here excludes women.

If these instructions are forced on women in a harsh, legalistic spirit, the result is usually twofold. God is not pleased with an enforced obedience which does not spring from the heart (Psalm 51:17). The women themselves are apt to become bitter and resentful. If, on the other hand, the reasons for such instructions are clearly understood, and there follows the obedience of a loving, submissive heart, then this is of great price in the sight of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:22).

3. Reasons Why

God has graciously condescended to state certain underlying principles in His Word in order to explain why Christian women should be in subjection to the men.

First of all, in the order of creation, man had priority over the woman. “Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2: 13). “The man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man” (1 Corinthians 11:8). The argument here is that the order instituted by God in creation is the order which He intends to be maintained in the church; namely, the head of the woman is the man (1 Corinthians 11: 3).

Secondly, the purpose of creation indicates the headship of the man over the woman. “Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11: 9). Thirdly, sin entered into the world when Eve usurped authority over her husband, Adam. “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14). The Lord does not wish His new creation to be marred through this type of insubjection, and so He has instructed the women to be under obedience.

In the fourth place, Paul appeals to the consistent testimony of the old Testament Scriptures to show that women should be under obedience (1 Corinthians 14:34). “They are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. While no particular commandment states this clearly, yet it is the tenor of the Old Testament.

4. The Covered Head

With regard to the instruction that women should be covered (or veiled) when praying or prophesying, two

additional reasons are presented. Angels are looking on. “For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:10, R.V.). This verse seems to picture the angelic hosts observing God’s order on the earth, and it states that women should wear a covering on their head as a sign or badge of the authority of the man. Thus, the angels see that the transgression of Eve in the first creation is not perpetuated in the new creation.

The lesson is taught by nature itself. “Doth not even nature itself teach you ...”, (1 Corinthians 11: 14). In the original creation, God gave women a distinctive covering—that of long hair. Paul argues from this that a divine principle is illustrated thereby; namely, that woman should wear a veil or covering over her head when praying or prophesying.

5. Accentuating the Positive

The fact that woman is in subjection to the man might seem to indicate to some that she has no place or ministry in God’s economy. However, the Scriptures contradict this by showing that woman’s ministry, though not a public one, is nonetheless real and important. Her position is saved by childbearing (1 Timothy 2: 15). This difficult verse might mean that a godly mother, though restrained from ministering publicly, is not thereby relegated to a place of uselessness. Her position is to rear her family in the fear and admonition of the Lord. If she and her husband continue in the faith, she may one day have sons to preach and teach the Word. Thus the expression, “she shall be saved,” might refer, not to the soul’s salvation, or even to being saved from physical death in the act of childbearing, but rather to the salvation of woman’s place and privilege. She will not become a nonentity, but will have this glorious ministry of rearing children to live for God’s glory.

Other examples of women’s ministry are found in the New Testament, such as ministering of their substance (Luke 8:3), showing hospitality (Romans 16:1), and teaching the younger women (Titus 2:4).

6. Some Common Objections

Numerous objections and questions arise in connection with the subject of women’s ministry. Does not Paul’s teaching on this subject, it is argued, represent the views of an unmarried man with a prejudice against women? No! They are teachings of the Holy Spirit of God, or, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “the commandments of the Lord.”

Then it is asked if Paul was merely teaching what was a local custom in his day without any idea that this state of things should be applicable to us today. The answer is that his first epistle to the Corinthians was written not only to the church of God in Corinth, but to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Therefore the instructions are of universal application. But, we are asked, does not Paul indicate in 1 Corinthians 11:16 that the things that he had been teaching were not binding, and that such customs were not practiced among the churches of God? (“But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”) Such an interpretation undermines the inspiration and authority of the Bible. What the verse really says is that contention about these commandments of the Lord was not a custom in the churches. The churches accepted them and obeyed them, without arguing or explaining them away. Since woman’s hair is given to her for a covering—it is argued, is not that the only covering that is required? There are two coverings in 1 Corinthians 11. A woman’s hair is mentioned as a covering in verse 15, but a veil is necessarily in view in verse 5. Otherwise verse 6 would be saying in effect, “For if a woman does not have her hair on, let her also be shorn, but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her put her hair on.” Obviously such a meaning is impossible. It must mean that a covering, other than her hair, is necessary.

Does not the instruction for women to keep silence in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34), merely prohibit their chattering or gossiping while the service is in progress? No! The passage says, “It is not permitted unto them to speak.” The word translated “speak” here never has the meaning of “chatter” or “babble” in the New Testament. The same word is used of God in verse 21, “With men of other tongues ... will I speak.”

Many additional questions arise, such as whether it is all right for women to give a testimony in public, to give an account of their missionary work, to sing a solo. Where individual cases are not specifically dealt with in the Bible, then the general principles of the Word must be allowed to decide. Thus, in any doubtful situation, we should ask: Does this constitute a usurping of authority over the man? Is woman taking a place of leadership? Is she teaching the Word? Since these things are prohibited, we should avoid anything that might constitute an infringement of the spirit of these teachings of the Word.

7. God's Wisdom is Manifest

God's design in setting forth these instructions was His people's good as well as His own glory. Where His Word has been ignored or wilfully violated, strife and disorder have ensued. The positive evil of women usurping authority and teaching publicly is seen in the rise of many cults—notably Seventh Day Adventism, Theosophy, Christian Science—in which women had a prominent role.

On the other hand, nothing is more comely and pleasant than to see Christian women occupying their God-appointed place and exhibiting "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4).

LET US GO FORTH UNTO HIM!

In the previous pages, we have discussed the church, both from its universal aspect and its local aspect. We have sought to discover the principles of the church as taught in the New Testament, and to catch the simplicity, zeal, and spirituality of the assembly as it existed in the days of the apostles. Now the question remains, "What is the application of all this to believers in the twentieth century?"

1. The Church Today

In order to answer this question, we should first take a brief look at conditions in the professing church today. We find widespread departure, failure, and ruin. We find vast ecclesiastical organizations combining material wealth and political influence but largely devoid of spiritual power. We find denominationalism and sectarianism claiming the loyalty and support of their adherents, yet presenting an unscriptural view of the church. We frequently find the meetings of the church occupied with a lifeless liturgy and a soul-deadening ritualism, offering the people shadows instead of Christ. We find churches with membership rolls including both saved and unsaved, both true believers and those with no vital union with the living Savior. Finally, we find churches that have been corrupted with the leaven of modernism, that have substituted a social gospel for the message of redeeming grace.

2. The Need for Separation

If it be asked what a Christian should do who finds himself in such a situation, there can only be one answer. Separate from it! The Word of God is mercilessly uncompromising in its insistence that believers should withdraw themselves from every form of evil—whether ecclesiastical, doctrinal, or moral. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

It is vain to argue that a Christian should remain within a corrupt church in order to be a voice for God in it. "There is not a single hero or saint, whose name sparkles on the inspired pages, who moved his times from within: all, without exception, have raised the cry, 'Let us go forth without the camp;'"... The man who goes into the world to level it up will soon find himself levelled down.... The safest and strongest position is outside the camp. Archimedes said he could move the world, if only he had a point of rest given him outside it. Thus, too, can a handful of God's servants influence their times, if only they resemble Elijah, whose life was spent altogether outside the pale of the court and the world of his time." "To all who argue for a continuance in a church position which they know to be wrong, Samuel furnishes a pointed and powerful reply—"To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

3. What Next?

But the question still remains, "What should a person do after he has obeyed the scriptural injunction to 'come out'?" In answer to this, we would suggest the following scriptural plan.

Gather together in Christian simplicity with a group of likeminded believers.

Gather to Christ alone; make Him the sole attraction. Though such a policy will not result in large crowds, it will at least provide a nucleus of faithful believers who will not be easily moved by trials or discouragements.

As far as a meeting place is concerned, a home is entirely satisfactory, and has a great deal of scriptural precedent (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). Those who require a splendid edifice with religious hardware have never really discovered the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as the Person to whom His people gather.

Adopt no name or policy that would exclude any true believer from the fellowship.

Adopt no denominational affiliation, and stedfastly refuse any outside control or interference that would infringe on the sovereignty of the local church.

Resist the constant tendency to allow the ministry to drift into the hands of one man. Rather allow the Holy Spirit to use the various gifts which Christ has given to the Church, and provide for the active manifestation of the priesthood of all believers.

Gather together regularly for prayer, study of the Word, breaking of bread, and fellowship. Then engage in an active gospel effort, both individually and collectively.

In short, seek to meet as a New Testament church in the truest sense of the word by giving a faithful representation of the body of Christ and by obeying the commandments of the Lord.

4. Those Who Have Come Out

Interestingly enough, this is being done by Christians all over the world today. With no guidebook but the Bible, they have found these principles to be divine, and have followed them in spite of reproach and slander. They own no head but Christ, no fellowship but His Body, no headquarters but His throne. They seek in true humility to witness to the unity of the body of Christ. In their fellowship, they seek to provide a sanctuary for true believers who are oppressed by modernism and related evils. There is no directory on earth that lists these churches, nothing of an earthly nature to bind them together. Their only unity is that which is formed and maintained by the Holy Spirit, and they are content that it should be so.

There is no reason why similar fellowships should not continue to be formed by the Great Head of the Church through the sacrificial and prayerful exercise of His people. Where Christians have caught the vision, and are willing to suffer for it, the Lord will reward their exercise and endeavors, and fulfill their longings for His glory.

Is it possible that on the very eve of the Lord's return, we are about to see a great revolt led by the Holy Spirit against apostate Christendom, and a fresh, new movement of His grace, forming small, independent fellowships of Bible-loving Christians? May He who loved the church, and gave Himself for it, bring it to pass, for His own glory!

William MacDonald:

First of all, we must distinguish between the New Testament concept of a bishop, and the title as it is used today. In the apostolic church, a bishop was simply one of several mature Christians in a local church who cared for the spiritual welfare of that church. Today, in church systems, a bishop is an appointed dignitary who has many churches under his jurisdiction. Barnes says: "The word bishop in the New Testament never means what is now commonly understood by it—a Prelate. It does not denote here (i.e. in 1 Timothy 3) or anywhere else in the New Testament, one who has charge over a diocese composed of a certain district of country embracing a number of churches with their clergy."

In the New Testament, the bishops were not a class of men, mediating between God and man. Perhaps it was as a rebuke to such pretension as might arise in the future that the Spirit of God listed the bishops second, not first, when Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus . . . with the bishops and deacons."

In the New Testament, the thought of officialism is absent. Instead of a lofty office with magnificent titles, we are pointed to humble service among the people of God. Thus we read, "If any one is eager for oversight, he is desirous of a good work." Overseership is work, not dignity of office.

Finally, we would notice, by way of introduction, that the words, "bishop," "elder," "overseer" and "presbyter" all refer to the same person in the New Testament. This can be demonstrated by the following comparisons of Scripture with Scripture. In Acts 20:17, we find a reference made to the "elders" of the church. The margin of the Revised Version indicates that this word is the same as "presbyters." Then in Acts 20:28, these same "elders" or "presbyters" are called "overseers." Here the word "overseers" is translated "bishops" in the Revised Version. In Titus 1:5, Paul instructs Titus to ordain "elders"; he then immediately (v. 7) proceeds to give the qualifications of a "bishop," indicating again that "elders" are the same as "bishops."

HOW BISHOPS ARE SELECTED?

Now let us consider the question of how elders are selected or appointed. In the final analysis, only the Holy Spirit can make a man an elder (Acts 20:28). A church may meet in solemn session to appoint elders, but their vote does not put within a man the heart of an overseer. The scriptural order would seem to be that God makes men overseers, then as they carry on their work, the church recognizes them as divinely-appointed bishops.

If it be argued that Paul and others appointed bishops (Acts 14: 23; Titus 1:5), we would simply say that this was before the New Testament was available in written form in the churches. In the absence of written instructions as to the qualifications of elders, the churches had to depend on these apostles or apostolic delegates. It should also be noted that Paul never ordained elders on his first visit to a church. Rather he allowed time for those elders whom God had ordained to manifest themselves by their work. Then he singled them out for recognition by the church.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A BISHOP

The Scriptures leave us in no doubt as to the qualifications of a true bishop or elder. These are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:6-9.

First of all, the bishop must be blameless. As to his reputation, he must be above reproach. It does not say he must be sinless, but blameless. If a public accusation can be proved against a man, he should refrain from assuming the duties of an overseer. Secondly, he must be the husband of one wife. Some understand this to mean that he must be a married man. Others see in it a prohibition against a polygamist ever becoming an elder. We can definitely say that the latter is true, but it is hard to be dogmatic on the first. Next, he must be vigilant. The Revised Version tells that this means temperate. He must not be a man given to excess. Some persons find it hard to be moderate. They are always going to extremes. Such men may be in the church, but they may not be overseers. The elder must be sober, or sober-minded. He must evidence by his life that Christianity is not a pleasant pastime, a frivolous trifle. The elder grapples with eternal issues. He must be of good behavior, or a better rendering would be "orderly." Carelessness or slipshod methods are unbecoming to one who would serve in a house of order. Next, we read, "given to hospitality," or "a lover

of hospitality. His home should be open to the Lord's people. It should be like the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha in Bethany—a place where Jesus loved to be. The bishop should be apt to teach. Although he might not be an outstandingly gifted teacher, still he should be sufficiently proficient in handling the Scriptures to be able to help the people of God with problems as they arise.

He must not be addicted to wine, or as another translation renders it, he must not be a brawler. The two are closely allied. Any man who cannot control his own appetite surely is not worthy of a place of trust in the church.

He must not be a striker. The literal meaning is that he must not use violence on others. To strike a servant, for instance, would be inconsistent with eldership. He must not be greedy of filthy lucre. The true bishop understands that money is to be used for the Lord and for the advancement of His interests. A grasping, greedy Christian is a paradox. He must be patient. His Master was gentle, and the servant is not above his Master. Meekness and patience may not be virtues in the secular world, but they still are in the Kingdom of God. He must not be a brawler, or contentious. Some are ready to fight and to argue over matters of little consequence. Not so a bishop. Then, again, he must not be covetous. To covet is to want something which God never intended one to have. Covetousness is idolatry, because it puts one's will above the will of God. The elder must rule his own house well, having his children in subjection with all gravity—children who believe, and who are not accused of riot or unruly. The necessity for this requirement is obvious. "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5). He must not be a novice. This is implied in the name "elder." Spiritual maturity is necessary. A man may be old in years, and yet not be qualified for spiritual oversight because of lack of experience as a Christian. The danger is that a novice becomes lifted up with pride, and falls into the condemnation of the devil. He must have a good report of them that are without. The world should know that he is a man of Christian character and integrity. He must not be self-willed, not soon angry, a lover of that which is good. He must be just and holy. Finally, he must hold fast the faithful word; that is, he must be a defender of the faith. To summarize the qualifications of an elder, we might say that he must be able to control himself, he must be able to control his own home, and he must be a contender for the truth of God. Now it should be noted that the Bible does not say the bishop must be an ordained clergyman. It does not say he must have a college degree. It does not say he must be a successful businessman. It is not of importance whether he is prominent in the community. Nothing is said about his personal appearance or the size of his bank balance. He might be a hunch-backed, ungainly, poor, old street-sweeper, and still be an elder in the church of God. Let us ponder this seriously. Doubtless one of the greatest blights on the church today is the recognition of men as elders who do not have the spiritual qualifications. Because a man has been successful in business, he is catapulted into a place of leadership in the church, even though he may have little or no spirituality. The result is an abundance of whatever money will buy and an absence of spiritual power.

THE DUTIES OF A BISHOP

What are the duties of elders? First of all they are to feed the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). They do this by ministering the Word of God. It does not necessarily imply public ministry, but may be by visitation from house to house.

Secondly, they are to do the work of overseers. "Taking the oversight thereof," Peter writes. What does this mean? The rest of the passage explains what it does not mean, and what it does mean. It does not mean serving by constraint. This must be a willing service. It does not mean working for monetary gain. Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. It does not mean forcing it over God's heritage. The elder is not a dictator, not a taskmaster, not a boss. But it does mean being an example to the flock. The elder must remember that the Good Shepherd does not drive His sheep—He leads them. Every under-shepherd should do the same. From the human standpoint, it would be much easier to have centralized human authority in the church, so that orders could be issued from headquarters, and obedience would be mandatory. But that is not God's way. The elders oversee the church by being examples to the flock.

In a very real way, the elders set the tone in a church. Where there are elders who are godly men, who put the Lord first in their lives, who radiate the grace of the Lord Jesus, one can expect to find a healthy, spiritual church; on the other hand, where the elders are engrossed in the affairs of the world, occupied with outside interests, too busy to read the Word or to pray, one can expect to find a coldness and deadness among the flock.

Again, the elders are told to support the weak. "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than

to receive,, (Acts 20:35). The context implies that they should be ready to help those who are in need by giving to them. That is an interesting thing. Instead of making a living off the flock, they should share their living with the flock.

Finally, the elders should reprove, rebuke and exhort (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15). Whatever is contrary to the faith must be rebuked with all authority. Those who will not endure sound doctrine should be reprovved and exhorted. The elder must earnestly contend for the faith.

What attitude should the church take toward elders? It is clear from 1 Timothy 5:17, 18 that some elders are cared for in a financial way by the church. “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward.” It is equally clear that others worked for their own support. Paul himself is an outstanding instance of this (1 Corinthians 4:12). In addition, an elder is not to be rebuked, but entreated as a father (1 Timothy 5:1). Christians should not receive an accusation against an elder except before two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). And then, the bishops should be remembered, recognized and obeyed. “Esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:7, 8). Finally, we note the rewards of the bishops. “When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5: 4).

William MacDonald:

DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

In the New Testament, the word church is a translation of the Greek word *eklesia*, which means “a called-out company,” “a gathering” or an “assembly.” Stephen used the word to describe Israel as “the church (assembly) in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38). It is also used in the book of Acts to describe a heathen mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:32,39,41). But the most common use of the word in the New Testament is to describe a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul speaks of “the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). In his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, the great apostle divides the whole world into Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). Again, he identifies the church of God as including the group of Christian believers whom he persecuted before his conversion (1 Corinthians 15:9).

It has often been said that the Church is not an organization but an organism. By this is meant that it is not a lifeless institution but a living unit. It is a fellowship of all those who share the life of Christ and who are linked together in living union by the Holy Spirit. It has been well called “a pure communion of persons without institutional character.” Many descriptive titles are given to the Church in the New Testament, and one of the best ways of arriving at an understanding of the church is to consider the significance of each title. The following are the prominent descriptions of the church:

1. A flock (John 10:16, R.V.).

The Jewish nation was a fold. The Church is a flock. In John 10: 16 the Lord Jesus said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold (Israel): them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock (R.V.) and one Shepherd.” The idea of a flock brings before our minds a group of Christians living together under the loving, tender care of the Good Shepherd hearing His voice and following Him.

2. God’s husbandry (1 Corinthians 3:9)

The Church is God’s garden plot in which He purposes to raise fruit for His glory. The thought of fruit-bearing is thus brought before us here.

3. God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:9)

This expression pictures God as carrying on a building program. He is adding living stones to the Church. How important it is that our lives should be devoted to the construction project in which He is so vitally interested!

4. The temple of God (1 Corinthians 3: 16)

The word “temple” immediately brings before us the thought of worship, and reminds us that the only true worship God gets on earth today is from those who are members of the Church. Worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). Such worship can only come from redeemed hearts.

5. The body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23)

The body is the vehicle by which a person expresses himself. Thus the body of Christ is the unit through which the Lord chooses to express Himself to the world today. Once this great truth is grasped, a believer will never again think of the Church as of minor importance, but will devote himself unreservedly to the best interests of the body of Christ.

6. A new man (Ephesians 2:15)

Here the idea of a new creation is prominent. The greatest of all differences among men—that of Jew and Gentile—has been abolished in the Church, and God makes of these two peoples one new man.

7. An habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22)

This expression conveys the truth that God now dwells in the Church, rather than in a material tabernacle or temple, as in the Old Testament.

8. The bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Corinthians 11:2)

This view of the Church gives prominence to the idea of affection. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” If Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, then obviously the Church should be filled with bridal affection for Him.

9. The house of God (1 Timothy 3:15)

A house (or household) speaks to us of order and discipline. The thought of order is suggested in 1 Timothy 3:15: “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God.” Discipline is suggested in 1 Peter 4:17: “Judgment must begin at the house of God.”

10. The pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)

In addition to being a support for a building, a pillar was often used in early days for posting public notices. It was a means of proclamation. The word “ground” means a bulwark or a support. Thus the Church of God is the unit which He has ordained for proclaiming, supporting, and defending His truth. We may safely say, therefore, that if Christians are to be in the current of God’s will and purposes, they should devote their finest efforts to the expansion and spiritual welfare of the Church.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Many boast today that their mission is to preach the gospel, and they take a detached view of anything to do with the church. They should notice that the Apostle Paul’s ministry was twofold: (1) “To preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,” and also (2) “To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery,” that is, to ground them in the great truths of the Church (Ephesians 3:8, 9).

ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Great and godly men have differed widely as to the time of the beginning of the Church. Many believe that the Church is a continuation of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Others maintain stoutly that the Church did not exist in the Old Testament, but that it began in the new dispensation. In favor of the latter viewpoint are three considerations.

In Ephesians 3:4, 5, Paul speaks of the Church as a “mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” Again, in verse 9 he states that the Church is a “mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.” (See also Colossians 1: 26; Romans 16:25, 26.) Thus the Church was a secret, kept by God throughout the Old Testament times, and never revealed until the New Testament apostles and prophets appeared. In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my Church.” In other words, the Church was still future at the time He spoke. Again, in Ephesians 4:8-10, Paul emphasizes that it was the risen, ascended Christ who gave gifts to the Church. This argues strongly that if the Church existed before His ascension, it must have lacked gifts for its edification.

We believe it is not only possible to show that the Church began in the new dispensation, but, more specifically, that it was brought into being on the day of Pentecost.

The body of Christ is said to have been formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Can we determine then when the baptism with the Holy Spirit took place? In Acts 1:5, immediately prior to the Lord’s ascension, He promised the apostles, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” On the day of Pentecost, “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4, 11:15-16). By the time we reach Acts 5:11, the Church has definitely come into being, because we read that “great fear came upon all the Church....” This certainly seems to pin-point the birthday of the Church as occurring at Pentecost.

The Division of Soul And Spirit

William MacDonald:

“...the division of soul and spirit.” (Heb. 4:12 NASB)

When the Bible speaks of man in his tripartite being, the order is always spirit, soul and body. When men use these terms together, the order almost invariably is body, soul and spirit. Sin has turned God’s order upside down. Now man puts the body first, then the soul, and the spirit last of all.

The two non-material parts of man’s being are his spirit and his soul. The spirit enables him to have fellowship with God. The soul has to do with his emotions and passions. Although it is not possible for us to distinguish the spirit and soul in minute detail, we can and should learn to distinguish between what is spiritual and soulish.

What then is spiritual? Preaching that exalts Christ is. Prayer to God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit is. Service that is motivated by love to the Lord and empowered by the Spirit is. Worship that is in spirit and truth is.

And what is soulish? Preaching that draws attention to man, to his oratory, commanding presence or wit. Mechanical prayers with no real heart involvement but designed to make an impression on others. Service that is self-appointed, carried on for monetary reward, or employing carnal methods. Worship that revolves around visible, material aids rather than the unseen spiritual realities.

What does the Church of God have to do with consecrated buildings, stained glass windows, ecclesiastical vestments, honorific titles, candles, incense and all such trappings? Or, coming closer to home, what does the Church have to do with Madison Avenue promotional efforts, with fund raising for hire, with evangelistic gimmickry, with personality cults, with musical extravaganzas?

The advertising in the average Christian magazine is enough to show how soulish we have become.

Paul draws a distinction between service that is gold, silver, precious stones and that which is wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12). Everything that is spiritual will resist the fire of God’s discerning judgment. All that is soulish will go up in flames.

The Doctrine of Grace

William MacDonald:

“If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” (Rom. 11:6 NASB)

When a person gets grounded early in the doctrine of grace, he saves himself from a host of problems in later life. It is so basic to understand that salvation is a free gift of God’s grace and that it is given to those who not only do not deserve it but who in fact deserve the very opposite. There is nothing meritorious a person can do or become to earn eternal life. It is given to those who abandon any thoughts of personal worthiness but who rest their case on the worthiness of the Savior alone.

If we see that salvation is all of grace, then we can have full assurance. We can know that we are saved. If salvation depended in the slightest degree on ourselves and our miserable attainments, then we could never know for sure. We wouldn’t know whether we had done enough good works or the right kind. But when it depends on the work of Christ, then there doesn’t have to be any nagging doubt.

The same is true of our eternal security. If our continued safety somehow depended on our own ability to hold out, then we might be saved today and lost tomorrow. But as long as our safety depends on the Savior’s ability to keep us, we can know we are eternally secure.

Those who live under grace are not helpless pawns of sin. Sin does have dominion over those under law because the law tells them what to do but doesn’t give them the power to do it. Grace gives a person a perfect standing before God, teaches him to walk worthy of his calling, enables him to do it by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and rewards him for doing it.

Under grace, service becomes a joyful privilege, not a legal bondage. The believer is motivated by love, not by fear. The memory of what the Savior suffered to provide salvation inspires the saved sinner to pour out his life in devoted service.

Grace also enriches life by inspiring thanksgiving, worship, praise and adoration. The knowledge of who the Savior is, of what sinners we are by nature and by practice, and of all He has done for us causes our hearts to overflow in loving adoration to Him.

There’s nothing like the grace of God. It’s the crown jewel of all His attributes. Get grounded in the truth of the sovereign grace of God and it will transfigure all of life.

The Gospel is the Good News

William MacDonald:

“...the gospel of the glory of Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:4)

We should never forget that the gospel is the good news of the glory of Christ. True, it concerns the One who was crucified and who was buried. But He is no longer on the Cross, no longer in the Tomb. He has risen, has ascended to heaven, and is the glorified Man at God’s right hand.

We do not present Him as the humble Carpenter of Nazareth, the suffering Servant or the Stranger of Galilee. Neither do we present Him as the effeminate do-gooder of modern religious art.

We preach the Lord of life and glory. He is the One whom God has highly exalted and given a Name which is above every name. At His Name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Him Lord to the glory of God the Father. He is crowned with glory and honor, a Prince and a Savior.

Too often we dishonor Him by the message we preach. We exalt man with his talents and create the impression that God would be lucky to have such a man to serve Him. We make it sound as if man were doing a colossal favor to the Lord by trusting Him. That isn’t the Gospel which the Apostles preached. They said, in effect, “You are the guilty murderers of the Lord Jesus Christ. You took Him and with wicked hands nailed Him to the tree. But God raised Him from the dead and glorified Him at His own right hand in heaven. He is there today, in a glorified body of flesh and bones. His nail-scarred hand holds the sceptre of universal dominion. He is coming back again to judge the world in righteousness. And you’d better REPENT and turn to Him in FAITH. There is no other way of salvation. There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

O, for a fresh vision of the Man in the glory! And for a tongue to tell forth the myriad glories that crown His brow! Surely then, as at Pentecost, sinners would tremble before Him and cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The Hatred of God in the Human Heart

William MacDonald:

“When a man’s folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord.” (Prov. 19:3, RSV)

There is no book on psychology like the Bible. It gives insights on human behavior that you cannot find in any other place. Here, for instance, it describes a man whose own waywardness wrecks his life, yet rather than shoulder the blame himself, he turns around and vents his spleen on the Lord.

How true to life! We have known people who made a profession of being Christians but who then became involved in vile forms of sexual immorality. This brought them to shame, disgrace and financial ruin. But would they repent? No, they turned against Christ, renounced the faith, and became militant atheists.

More often than we probably realize, apostasy has its roots in moral failure. A. J. Pollock told of meeting a young man who began to spew out all kinds of doubts and denials concerning the Scriptures. When Pollock asked him, “What sin have you been indulging in?” the young man broke down and poured out a lurid story of sin and indecency.

The gross injustice lies in man’s perverse way of raging against the Lord for the consequences of his own sins. W. F. Adeney said, “It is monstrous to charge the providence of God with the consequences of actions which He has forbidden.”

How true it is that “everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved,” (John 3:20)! The Apostle Peter reminds us that scoffers “walking after their own lusts” are “willingly ignorant”. Pollock comments, “This brings out a most important truth that the inability and reluctance to receive the truth of God is very largely because of what is moral. Often a man wants to go on with his sin, or the flesh has a natural dislike to God. Maybe the searching character of the light, and the restraining influence of the Bible are resented. It is not the head that is so much at fault as the heart.”

William MacDonald:**CHRIST THE HEAD**

A second truth to which the local church should be a witness is that Christ is the Head of the body. How can believers testify to this fact today? Obviously they must accept no human leader as head of the Church. The most glaring violation of this is the head of a large religious system who claims to be the temporal head of the body of Christ. Most Christians today have seen the folly of such a pretension, yet in somewhat subtler forms the evil has infiltrated into almost all segments of Christendom.

The Headship of Christ is truly acknowledged when He is allowed to control the church's activities, to make its decisions, to superintend in every department. To many this will sound vague and impractical. How can the Lord in heaven guide a local church on earth? The answer is that He will never fail to make His will known to those who patiently wait on Him for it. True, this requires a great deal of spiritual exercise on the part of the believers. It would be much easier to take matters in their own hands, and make their own plans. But it should be remembered that New Testament principles can only be carried out with New Testament power, and those who are unwilling to tread the path of dependence, prayer, and patient waiting will never have the privilege of seeing the Great Head of the Church guiding the local church or assembly here on earth.

At this point it might be appropriate to emphasize that it is one thing to give lip-service to the Headship of Christ and quite another thing to acknowledge it practically. There are some who apparently would shed their blood for the truth of the Headship of Christ, and yet who deny it practically by being virtual dictators in the assembly. A man or a group of men may not have any official title or designation in a church and yet rule it ruthlessly. Diotrephes was such a man (3 John 9, 10). He loved to have the preeminence; he spoke against godly men like John with malicious words; he would not receive such men, and forbade those who would, casting them out of the church. This was a positive denial of Christ as Head.

Perhaps a word should be added concerning the headquarters of the church. The word headquarters speaks of the center of operations and of authority. The headquarters of the church are where the Head is; namely, in heaven. A local church cannot consistently recognize any controlling organization such as a synod, presbytery, or council where control is exercised over a single church or a group of churches. Each assembly stands directly responsible to the Head of the Church, and should be nothing and do nothing that would deny that truth.

RECEPTION POLICY

As pointed out previously, a third important truth in connection with the Church is that all believers are members of the body. It is the duty of the assembly to set forth this truth with accuracy and faithfulness. Nothing that it teaches or practices should deny the oneness of all Christians. If we inquire how the local church can witness to this, we shall find ourselves concerned with the policies it follows in receiving others into its fellowship. This subject is commonly known as reception policy, and the principles are clear.

1. THE GENERAL RULE

The general principle is that the local church or assembly should receive all those whom Christ has received. "Wherefore receive ye one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). The basis of true fellowship is the fact that a person has already been received into the body of Christ. The local church merely gives visible expression to that fact by welcoming him into its midst.

2. EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

However, this is not a rule without exception. There are three additional requirements which are implicit in the teachings of the New Testament. The person received must be holy in life (1 Corinthians 5:11; 10:21). It would obviously give a very inaccurate representation of the holy character of the church to receive a fornicator, a covetous man, an idolater, a railer, a drunkard or an extortioner.

Closely associated with this is the fact it would be quite improper to receive a person who was at the time under

discipline by another local church (1 Corinthians 5:13). This would be a denial of the unity of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4). Until an excommunicated person has been restored to fellowship with the Lord and with His people, he is counted as a heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:17).

Finally, the person must be sound as to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 10). "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed", The question arises here as to what is included in the doctrine of Christ. The expression is not explained in this passage, but we would suggest that the doctrine of Christ includes the great truths concerning His Person and Work: namely, His deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His substitutionary death, His burial, resurrection and ascension, and His coming again.

To summarize then, we would conclude that a local church should receive into its fellowship all born-again believers who are holy in life, not under discipline by some other local church or assembly, and sound in doctrine.

3. OTHER PERTINENT RULES

But the Scriptures give us some other instructions as to the matter of reception. The local assembly should:

1. Receive him who is weak in the faith (Romans 14: 1). This refers to a Christian who is unduly scrupulous with regard to matters of moral indifference. The fact that he is a vegetarian, for instance, should not exclude him. 2. Receive without respect of persons (James 2 1-5). The Bible warns against showing special consideration to the rich, and despising the poor. This would apply too in the matter of race, social level, or culture. Discrimination is unchristian. 3. Receive on the basis of life, not light (Acts 9:26-38). Fellowship is not dependent on how much one knows, but rather on the Person whom he knows. Thus, Apollos was received in Ephesus, even though his knowledge was quite defective (Acts 18:24-28). 4. Receive on the basis of life, not of ordinance. Baptism is nowhere said to be the door into the local church. Though it is true that all believers should be baptized (Matthew 28:19), yet the moment we say that a person must be baptized in order to be received into fellowship, we have gone beyond the Word. 5. Receive on the basis of life, not service. Just because we might not agree with a Christian's sphere of service is no reason for denying him the fellowship of the local church. In Luke 9:53, we read that the Samaritans would not receive the Lord Jesus because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. They were motivated by sectarianism rather than by divine principles. 6. Receive a person in spite of what he may have been before he was saved. Paul had been a persecutor, but he was received without regard to his past history (Acts 9:27, 28). Onesimus had been a thief, but Paul exhorts Philemon to receive him (Philemon 12,15,17). When an assembly's doors are closed to converted drunkards, gamblers, or outcasts, it has lost its true character as an available center of worship for God's people. 7. Receive believers in the Lord with gladness (Philippians 2:29). In a very real sense, the way we treat the weakest member of His body, is the way we treat the Lord Himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

4. HOW TO KNOW IF A PERSON IS SAVED

Now the question invariably arises, "How is an assembly to know whether a person is really saved and eligible for fellowship?. At least five possible approaches may be suggested. First, there is the use of letters of recommendation (Romans 16:1). A Christian travelling from one assembly to another can avoid considerable difficulty and embarrassment by carrying a letter from his home assembly, testifying to his faith and walk.

Then the testimony of two or three witnesses is acceptable (Matthew 18:16). If a person is known to two or more Christians in a local church, that church may receive him on their recommendation.

The testimony of only one person, but one who has the confidence of the assembly, can be taken. Paul commended Phebe to the saints at Rome (Romans 16: 1), and Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi (Philippians 2:28-30).

A man's own reputation as a servant of Christ is sufficient (2 Corinthians 3:1-2). Paul disclaimed the necessity of a letter of commendation to the church at Corinth because he was well-known to them as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

There can be a careful inquiry and investigation by the assembly itself. By this is meant that an assembly, perhaps through the elders, may question a person as to his faith in Christ, etc., asking him to give a reason of

the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15). They may then receive him after reasonable assurance that he belongs to Christ.

5. COMMON PROBLEMS

Before closing this section on reception, we should also consider three other questions which commonly arise in connection with this subject.

Does the church have any right to judge whether a man is saved or not? The answer is that this is not only a right but a sacred obligation. Since Christians are forbidden to have fellowship with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17), it is obvious that they are required to use every reasonable means to discern the spiritual status of those who seek a place among the people of God.

Suppose an assembly receives a man and he subsequently teaches error in the church? Then his teaching should be publicly refuted from the Word of God (1 Timothy 5:20). A New Testament church can only function in the environment of an open Bible. It should have godly elders who can expose error and defend the faith (Titus 1:9).

Suppose a local church receives a person, and he either attends irregularly thereafter, or never comes back? In the first place it should be emphasized that fellowship means sharing or holding things in common. Those in fellowship should enter into the life of the assembly, bear their load of responsibility, and share the work involved. Generally speaking, if a person attends only one service a week, he is limited in fellowship. Reception into a local church is in reality a reception into the hearts and homes of the Christians making up the fellowship of that church. With regard to a person who is received but who never returns, the man himself is accountable. The assembly is responsible to present to him a faithful and spiritual representation of the Church. He is thereafter obligated to be obedient to the truth.

Obviously the subject of reception is a complicated one, and we have only been able to touch on some of its more important aspects. Recognizing the incompleteness of our coverage, we move on to the next major point.

William MacDonald:

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

The assembly should seek His guidance in all its affairs whether in choosing a location for its public testimony, arranging the types of meetings to be held, discerning the human instruments to be used in ministering the Word of God, disbursement of funds, or carrying on godly discipline.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SOVEREIGN

The local church should ever recognize the sovereignty of the Spirit. By this we mean that He can do as He pleases, and that He will not always choose to do things in exactly the same way, though He will never act contrary to the Word. Some of the symbols of the Spirit used in the scriptures – fire, oil, water, wind speak of fluidity, of unpredictable behavior. Thus, wise Christians will be sufficiently elastic to allow Him this divine prerogative.

It was so in the early church, but soon people became uneasy with meetings that were “free and social, with the minimum of form.” Thus controls were added and formalism and ritualism took over. The Holy Spirit was quenched, and the church lost its power.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT

This shift from the freedom of the Spirit to human control has been described by James Denney eloquently. Though Mr. Denney writes at some length, the reader will find his article will richly repay study. Commenting on the verse, “Quench not the Spirit,” (I Thess 5:19) he says: “When the Holy Spirit descended on the Church at Pentecost, there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them; and their lips were opened to declare the mighty works of God. A man who has received this great gift is described as fervent, literally, boiling, with the Spirit. The new birth in those early days was a new birth; it kindled in the soul thoughts and feelings to which it had hitherto been strange; it brought with it the consciousness of new powers; a new vision of God; a new love of holiness; a new insight into the Holy Scriptures, and into the meaning of man’s life; often a new power of ardent, passionate speech. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians Paul describes a primitive Christian congregation. There was not one silent among them. When they came together every one had a psalm, a revelation, a prophecy, an interpretation. The manifestation of the Spirit had been given to each one to profit withal; and on all hands the spiritual fire was ready to flame forth. Conversion to the Christian faith, the acceptance of the apostolic Gospel, was not a thing which made little difference to men: it convulsed their whole nature to its depth; they were never the same again; they were new creatures, with a new life in them, all fervor and flame

“A state so unlike nature, in the ordinary sense of the term, was sure to have its inconveniences. The Christian, even when he had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, was still a man; and as likely as not a man who had to struggle against vanity, folly, ambition, and selfishness of all kinds. His enthusiasm might even seem, in the first instance, to aggravate, instead of removing, his natural faults. It might drive him to speak-for in a primitive church anybody who pleased might speak – when it would have been better for him to be silent. It might lead him to break out in prayer or praise or exhortation, in a style which made the wise sigh. And for those reasons the wise, and such as thought themselves wise, would be apt to discourage the exercise of spiritual gifts altogether. ‘Contain yourself,’ they would say to the man whose heart burned within him, and who was restless till the flame could leap out; ‘contain yourself; exercise a little self-control; it is unworthy of a rational being to be carried away in this fashion.’

“No doubt situations like this were common in the church at Thessalonica. They are produced inevitably by difference of age and of temperament. The old and the phlegmatic are a natural, and, doubtless, a providential, counterweight to the young and sanguine. But the wisdom which comes of experience and of temperament has its disadvantages as compared with fervor of spirit. It is cold and unenthusiastic; it cannot propagate itself; it cannot set fire to anything and spread. And because it is under this incapacity of kindling the souls of men into enthusiasm, it is forbidden to pour cold water on enthusiasm when it breaks forth in words of fire. That is the meaning of ‘Quench not the Spirit.’ The commandment presupposes that the Spirit can be quenched. Cold looks, contemptuous words, silence, studied disregard, go a long way to quench it. So does unsympathetic criticism.

“Everyone knows that a fire smokes most when it is newly kindled; but the way to get rid of the smoke is not to pour cold water on the fire, but to let it burn itself clear. If you are wise enough you may facilitate this by rearranging the materials, or securing a better draught; but the wisest thing most people can do when the fire has got hold is to let it alone; and that is also the wise course for most when they meet with a disciple whose zeal burns like fire. Very likely the smoke hurts their eyes; but the smoke will soon pass by; and it may well be tolerated in the meantime for the sake of heat.

For this apostolic precept takes for granted that fervor of spirit, a Christian enthusiasm for what is good, is the best thing in the world. It may be untaught and inexperienced; it may have all its mistakes to make; it may be wonderfully blind to the limitations which the stern necessities of life put upon the generous hopes of man: but it is of God; it is expansive; it is contagious; it is worth more as a spiritual force than all the wisdom in the world.

“I have hinted at ways in which the Spirit is quenched, it is sad to reflect that from one point of view the history of the church is a long series of rebellions of the Spirit. ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is,’ the Apostle tells us elsewhere, ‘there is liberty.’ But liberty in a society has its dangers; It is, to a certain extent, at war with order; and the guardians of order are not apt to be too considerate of it. Hence it came to pass that at a very early period, and in the interests of good order, the freedom of the Spirit was summarily suppressed in the church. ‘The gift of ruling,’ it has been said, ‘like Aaron’s rod, seemed to swallow up the other gifts.’ The rulers of the church became a class entirely apart from its ordinary members, and all exercise of spiritual gifts for the building up of the church was confined to them. Nay, the monstrous idea was originated, and taught as a dogma, that they alone were the depositaries, or, as it is sometimes said, the custodians, of the grace and truth of the gospel; only through them could men come into contact with the Holy Ghost. In plain English, the Spirit was quenched when Christians met for worship. One great extinguisher was placed over the flame that burned in the hearts of the brethren; it was not allowed to show itself; it must not disturb, by its eruption in praise or prayer or fiery exhortation, the decency and order of divine service.

I say that was the condition to which Christian worship was reduced at a very early period; and it is unhappily the condition in which, for the most part, it subsists at this moment. Do you think we are gainers by it? I do not believe it. It has always come from time to time to be intolerable. The Montanists of the second century, the heretical sects of the middle ages, the Independents and Quakers of the English Commonwealth, the lay preachers of Wesleyanism, the Salvationists, the Plymouthists, and the Evangelistic associations of our own day, all these are in various degrees the protest of the Spirit, and its right and necessary protest, against the authority which would quench it, and by quenching it impoverish the church.

The assembly, then, should never fetter the Holy Spirit, either with unscriptural rules, stereotyped program, rituals, or liturgies. How grieved He must often be by rigid understandings that a meeting must end at a certain time, that a service must always follow a certain routine, that ministry at certain stages of a worship meeting is quite unacceptable! Such regulations can only lead to a loss of spiritual power.

IF THE SPIRIT HAD HIS WAY TODAY

We might well pause to ask ourselves what it would be like in our local churches if the Holy Spirit were really depended on to be the Divine Leader. C. H. Mackintosh gives a vivid description of such a situation, and we reproduce it here:

“We have but little conception of what an assembly would be were each one distinctly led by the Holy Ghost, and gathered only to Jesus. We should not then have to complain of dull, heavy, unprofitable, trying meetings. We should have no fear of an unhallowed intrusion of mere nature and its restless doings—no making of prayer—no talking for talking’s sake—no hymnbook seized to fill a gap. Each one would know his place in the Lord’s immediate presence—each gifted vessel would be filled, fitted, and used by the Master’s hand—each eye would be directed to Jesus—each heart occupied with Him. If a chapter were read it would be the very voice of God. If a word were spoken, it would tell with power upon the heart. If prayer were offered, it would lead the soul into the very presence of God. If a hymn were sung, it would lift the spirit up to God, and be like sweeping the strings of the heavenly harp. We should feel ourselves in the very sanctuary of God and enjoy a foretaste of that time when we shall worship in the courts above and go no more out.

The Incarnation and Resurrection

William MacDonald:

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Rom. 10:9)

This favorite Gospel verse zeroes in on the two basic truths that are so hard for fallen man to accept—the incarnation and the resurrection. There can be no salvation without accepting these doctrines and all that they signify.

First we must confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, that is, that the One who was born in Bethlehem’s stable is none other than God manifest in the flesh. The deity of the Lord Jesus is essential to the whole plan of salvation.

Second, we must believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead. But this means more than the simple fact of the resurrection. It includes the fact that the Lord Jesus died on the Cross as our Substitute. He paid the penalty that our sins deserved. He endured the wrath of God that we should have endured eternally. Then on the third day God raised Him from the dead as a proof of God’s entire satisfaction with Christ’s sacrifice for our sins.

When we receive Him as Lord and Savior, the Bible says that we are saved.

But someone may ask, “Why is confession put before believing? Don’t we believe first and then confess?”

In verse 9 Paul is emphasizing the incarnation and the resurrection, and he gives the historical order in which they occurred - the incarnation first and the resurrection thirty-three years later.

In the next verse he puts believing before confessing. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Here the order is that which takes place when we are born again. First, we trust the Savior and are justified. Then we go out to confess the salvation which we have already received.

Our verse has an artless simplicity and perennial freshness about it. No wonder the children sing:

Romans ten and nine
Is a favorite verse of mine;
Confessing Christ as Lord,
I am saved by grace divine;
For there the words of promise
In golden letters shine:
Romans ten and nine.

William MacDonald:

THE LOCAL CHURCH DEFINED

Down through the years, there has been considerable disagreement as to what constitutes a New Testament church. The usual approach is to list a certain number of requirements or marks; if a group of Christians answers to these qualifications, then it is considered to be a true local church.

Henry Barrow has given what might be considered a rather typical definition of a church. He defined it as follows: "A true-planted and rightly-established church of Christ is a company of faithful people, separated from unbelievers, gathered in the Name of Christ, whom they truly worship and readily obey. They are a brotherhood, a communion of saints, each one of them standing in and for their Christian liberty to practice whatsoever God has commanded and revealed unto them in His Holy Word."

First Corinthians 1:2 gives a simple, yet accurate description of a local church. "To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

Other definitions have been far more restricted with the result that only the churches of a certain denomination or group actually qualify.

THE NEW TESTAMENT APPROACH

This raises a very real question. Does the New Testament list a certain number of requisites or essentials of a local church? Are the marks of an assembly stated so clearly that any believer could separate the fellowships in any area into those which are true New Testament churches and those which are not?

We would suggest that this is not the case. If becoming a true church were merely a matter of conforming to a certain pattern or going through a specified routine of meetings, then this could be done quite mechanically without spiritual exercise. Lethargy and complacency would result. Though the position of a church might be ever so correct, yet the condition of the believers might be far otherwise.

Instead of that, we believe that the New Testament approach is this. All believers are instructed that, by the grace of God, they are members of the Church. They are exhorted to gather together in such a way as to give expression to the great truths of the Church. Some assemblies of Christians give a very poor representation of the body of Christ. Other groups present a more faithful likeness. None does so perfectly.

Thus, instead of following the legalistic method which says, "If you meet certain requirements, you will become a church," the language of Scripture is the language of grace; namely, "You as believers are the Church; now meet in such a manner as to give an accurate expression of this fact to the world." The motive power under grace is love for the Savior, and this love should make us want to present a faithful image of the body of Christ to those around us.

A BRIEF SUMMARY - THE LOCAL CHURCH

To summarize then, the local church should be a miniature of the Church universal. It should be nothing and do nothing that would contradict the great truths of the Church which is the body of Christ.

As Ridout has said: "Its nature and unity must be manifested. It must be seen that it is the body of Christ, formed by and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that all believers are members of it, united to Christ glorified and to one another; that the Lord's coming is the hope before it; and that the Name of Christ is the only one by which it is called. Furthermore, it must exhibit the unity of the body of Christ."

If then, the local church must be a replica of the complete Church, what are the great truths of the body of Christ to which it must provide a living testimony? We have already referred to seven of these fundamental truths; namely:

A. There is one body.

- B. Christ is Head of the body.
- C. All believers are members of the body.
- D. The Holy Spirit is the representative of Christ in the Church.
- E. The Church of God is holy.
- E. Gifts are given for the edification of the Church.
- G. All believers are priests of God.

Our present objective, therefore, is to take these truths one by one, and seek to determine how the local church can portray them to the world.

THE TRUTH OF THE ONE BODY

The first truth to which the local church is responsible to witness is that there is one body. How can believers testify to this fact today?

1. WHAT NAME SHOULD BE TAKEN

Perhaps the most obvious way is by adopting no names that would separate them from other Christians. In the church of Corinth, some were saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Christ." Paul indignantly condemns such a spirit by asking, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

Today Christians divide themselves into denominations named after countries, religious leaders, ordinances, or forms of church government. All such are a practical denial of the unity of the body of Christ.

Clearly, the scriptural approach is for God's children to be known only by such names as are given in the Bible-names such as "believers" (Acts 5:14); "disciples" (Acts 9:1); "Christians" (Acts 11:26); "saints" (Ephesians 1:1); and "brethren," (James 2: 1). It is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in the Christian life to carry no name but that of a simple believer. The vast majority today feels that one must belong to some organized church and carry some other name than those given in the Word. Anyone who refuses to be known as anything but a child of God will suffer reproach at the hands even of other Christians and will always be a conundrum in the community. Yet how can believers consistently do otherwise?

But obviously it is not enough just to have a scripturally accurate name. It is all too possible to adhere strictly to the language of the Bible and yet be extremely sectarian in spirit. Some in Corinth were saying, "I am of Christ," for instance. Perhaps they prided themselves on the correctness of their name, but they actually meant that they were of Christ to the exclusion of other true believers. Paul found fault with them equally as much as with those who claimed loyalty to himself or Apollos.

2. WHAT ABOUT THE DENOMINATIONS?

When any doubt is voiced as to the scripturalness of denominations, the objection is commonly raised that the Lord has richly blessed in some of the great divisions and sects of the Church. Granting that this is true, we should still remember that the blessing of the Lord does not indicate divine approval in every detail. He honors His own Word though often its delivery is accompanied by much failure and imperfection. If God blessed only where there was perfection, there would be no blessing. Therefore the fact that any group has seen His hand does not mean that He approves of all that the group does. The message is always greater than the messenger.

The Lord's attitude toward divisions in the Church is clearly shown in 1 Corinthians 3:4: "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"

Divisions in the Church bring great evils. They create artificial barriers to fellowship. They limit the movement of gifted men of God whose ministry should be available to all the Church. They confuse the world, causing

men to ask, “Which church is right?”

In his renowned work, *The Lord’s Prayer for Believers*, Marcus Rainsford wrote: “For my own part, I believe sects and denominations to be the result of the devil’s attempt to mar and hinder as far as possible the visible union of the Church of God; and that they all have their root in our spiritual pride and selfishness, our self-sufficiency and our sin.”

“May God forgive us for, and correct our divisions! Nothing gives greater occasion to the outside world, than the differences between professing Christians. The bickerings and contentions between men and women of different sects and denominations of the visible Church of God has always been one of the world’s greatest hindrances. Instead of looking on, and being constrained to confess, See how these Christians love one another,” the world has too often reason to say, “See how they carp at one another, see how they judge one another, see how they malign one another.”

Sadly, this deplorable state exists all too often within some local churches and dishonor is thereby brought upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. TRUE UNITY

Believers who determine to witness to the unity of the body of Christ will find it a great difficulty to separate themselves from all divisions in the Church, and at the same time maintain a loving spirit toward all the people of God.

C. H. Mackintosh, beloved author of the *Notes on the Pentateuch*, wrote: “The grand difficulty is to combine a spirit of intense separation with a spirit of grace, gentleness and forbearance; or, as another has said, ‘to maintain a narrow circle with a wide heart.’ This is really a difficulty. As the strict and uncompromising maintenance of truth tends to narrow the circle around us, we all shall need the expansive power of grace to keep the heart wide and the affections warm. If we contend for truth otherwise than in grace, we shall only yield a one-sided and most unattractive testimony. And on the other hand, if we try to exhibit grace at the expense of truth, it will prove, in the end, to be only the manifestation of a popular liberty at God’s expense most worthless thing.”

W. H. Griffith Thomas expressed the same thought in his book, *Ministerial Life and Work*: “Let the principles be firmly fixed on the unmistakable rock of Divine truth, but let the sympathies go out as widely as possible to all who are endeavoring to live and labor for Christ. Never shall I forget the words of the saintly and noble Bishop Whipple of Minnesota, the Apostle of the Indians, as I heard them in London on a memorable occasion: ‘For thirty years I have tried to see the face of Christ in those who have differed from me.’”

The visible display of the unity of the body of Christ is not to be brought about by the various ecumenical movements about which so much is heard today. Such unions, councils or federations succeed only by compromising the great truths of the Scripture. Christian congregations deny their Lord when they join with those who repudiate the virgin birth of Christ, His sinless humanity, His substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension and exaltation, and His coming again.

The true basis of Christian unity is a common devotion to Christ and His Word. When His glory is the great desire of our hearts, then we will be drawn together, and then His prayer will be answered: “That they may be one, even as we are one,” (John 17:22). As Griffith Thomas has said, “It has often been pointed out that when the tide is out, there are little pools of water here and there on the shore, separated from each other by vast stretches of sand, and it is only when the great tide rolls in and submerges them all in its vast embrace that they become one and are united. So must it be, so will it be with our severances of heart, ‘our unhappy divisions’; the great tide of God’s love will flow deeper and fuller into each and all of our lives, and in the ocean of that love we realize the Divine ideal of love, joy, peace for evermore.”

In the meantime the responsibility of local churches is to seek to maintain a testimony to the unity of the body of Christ in a day when most of Christendom serves only to deny the fact. They can do this by acknowledging in spirit, principle and practice all their fellow-believers.

The Shadow Of Martyrdom

William MacDonald:

When a man is truly committed to Jesus Christ, it seems to be a matter of no importance to him whether he lives or dies. All that matters is that the Lord be glorified.

As you read *THE TRIUMPH OF JOHN AND BETTY STAM*, you will find a note repeated throughout the book—“that...Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

The same undertone is found in the writings of Jim Elliot. While still a student at Wheaton College, he wrote in his diary, “I am ready to die for the Aucas.”

At yet another time, he wrote, “Father, take my life, yea, my blood if Thou wilt, and consume it with Thine enveloping fire. I would not save it for it is not mine to save. Have it, Lord, have it all. Pour out my life as an oblation for the world. Blood is only of value as it flows before Thine altar.”

It seems that many of God’s heroes reached this same place in their dealings with God. They realized that “except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). They were willing to be that corn of wheat.

This attitude is exactly what the Savior taught His disciples, “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:24).

The more we think of it, the more reasonable it seems.

First of all, our lives do not belong to us anyway. They belong to the One Who valued us with the cost of His precious blood. Can we selfishly cling to that which is Another’s? C. T. Studd answered the question for himself:

I had known about Jesus dying for me, but I never understood that if He died for me, then I didn’t belong to myself. Redemption means buying back, so that if I belong to Him, either I had to be a thief and keep what wasn’t mine, or else I had to give up everything to God. When I came to see that Jesus Christ had died for me, it didn’t seem hard to give up all for Him.

Secondly, we are all going to die anyway if the Lord does not come in the meantime. Would it be a greater tragedy to die in the service of the King or as a mere accident statistic? Was Jim Elliot not right when he said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Thirdly, it is unanswerable logic that if the Lord Jesus died for us, the least we could do would be to die for Him. If the servant is not above his master, what right do we have to go to heaven more comfortably than the Lord Jesus did? It was this consideration that prompted Studd to say, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

Finally, it is criminal to hug our lives when through their reckless abandonment eternal blessing might flow to our fellow men. Men often offer their lives in the interests of medical research. Others die to rescue loved ones from blazing buildings. Still others die in battle to save their country from enemy powers. What are the lives of men worth to us? Can we say with F. W. H. Myers:

Only like souls I see the folks thereunder,
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings,
Sharing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented with a show of things.

Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call—
Oh, to save these! To perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all.

Not all are required to lay down their lives as martyrs. The stake, the spear, the guillotine are reserved for a select few, relatively speaking. But each of us can have the martyr spirit, the martyr zeal, the martyr devotion. Each of us can live as those who have already abandoned their lives to Christ.

Come ill, come well, the cross, the crown,
The rainbow and the thunder;
I fling my soul and body down
For God to plow them under.

The Rewards Of True Discipleship

A life that is abandoned to the Lord Jesus has its own deep reward. There is a joy and pleasure in following Christ that is life in its truest sense.

The Savior repeatedly said, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." In fact, this saying of His is found in the four Gospels more frequently than almost anything else He said (see Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25). Why is it repeated so often? Is it not because it sets forth one of the most fundamental principles of the Christian life, namely, that life hugged for self is life lost, but life poured out for Him is life found, saved, enjoyed, and kept for eternity?

To be a half-hearted Christian can only insure a miserable existence. To be out and out for Him is the surest way of enjoying His best.

To be a true disciple is to be a bondsman of Jesus Christ and to find that His service is perfect freedom. There is liberty in the step of all who can say, "I love my Master; I will not go out free."

The disciple is not bogged down by petty affairs or by passing things. He is concerned with eternal matters, and, like Hudson Taylor, enjoys the luxury of having few things to care for.

He may be unknown, and yet he is well known. Though constantly dying, yet he persistently lives. He is chastened but not killed. Even in sorrow, he is rejoicing. Although poor himself, he makes many rich. He himself has nothing, yet he possesses all things (2 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

And if it can be said that the life of true discipleship is the most spiritually satisfying life in this world, it can be said with equal certainty that it will be the most rewarded in the age to come. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

Therefore, the truly blessed man in time and in eternity is the one who can say with Borden of Yale, "Lord Jesus, I take hands off, as far as my life is concerned. I put Thee on the throne in my heart. Change, cleanse, use me as Thou shalt choose."

He Was Not Willing

"He was not willing that any should perish;"
Jesus enthroned in the glory above,
Saw our poor fallen world, pitied our sorrows,
Poured out His life for us, wonderful love!
Perishing, perishing! Thronging our pathway,
Hearts break with burdens too heavy to bear:
Jesus would save, but there's no one to tell them,
No one to lift them from sin and despair.

"He was not willing that any should perish:"
Clothed in our flesh with its sorrow and pain,
Came He to seek the lost, comfort the mourner,
Heal the heart broken by sorrow and shame.
Perishing, perishing! Harvest is passing,
Reapers are few and the night draweth near:
Jesus is calling thee, haste to the reaping,
Thou shalt have souls, precious souls for thy hire.

Plenty for pleasure, but little for Jesus;
Time for the world with its troubles and toys,
No time for Jesus' work, feeding the hungry,
Lifting lost souls to eternity's joys.

The Shadow Of Martyrdom

Perishing, perishing! Hark, how they call us;
Bring us your Savior, oh, tell us of Him!
We are so weary, so heavily laden,
And with long weeping our eyes have grown dim.

‘He was not willing that any should perish;
Am I His follower, and can I live
Longer at ease with a soul going downward,
Lost for the lack of the help I might give?
Perishing, perishing! Thou wast not willing;
Master, forgive, and inspire us anew;
Banish our worldliness, help us to ever
Live with eternity’s values in view.

—Lucy R. Meyer

The Terms Of Discipleship

William MacDonald:

True Christianity is an all-out commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Savior is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him—or their weekends—or their years of retirement. Rather He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives. “He looks today, as He has ever looked, not for crowds drifting aimlessly in His track, but for individual men and women whose undying allegiance will spring from their having recognized that He wants those who are prepared to follow the path of self-renunciation which He trod before them”¹—H. A. Evan Hopkins.

Nothing less than unconditional surrender could ever be a fitting response to His sacrifice at Calvary. Love so amazing, so divine, could never be satisfied with less than our souls, our lives, our all.

The Lord Jesus made stringent demands on those who would be His disciples—demands that are all but overlooked in this day of luxury living. Too often we look upon Christianity as an escape from hell and a guarantee of heaven. Beyond that, we feel that we have every right to enjoy the best that this life has to offer. We know that there are those strong verses on discipleship in the Bible, but we have difficulty reconciling them with our ideas of what Christianity should be.

We can accept the fact that soldiers give their lives for patriotic reasons. We do not think it strange that Communists give their lives for political reasons. But that “blood, sweat and tears” should characterize the life of a follower of Christ somehow seems remote and hard to grasp.

And yet the words of the Lord Jesus are clear enough. There is scarcely any room for misunderstanding if we accept them at their face value. Here are the terms of discipleship as laid down by the Savior of the world:

1. A supreme love for Jesus Christ.

“If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). This does not mean that we should ever have animosity or ill-will in our hearts toward our relatives, but it does mean that our love to Christ should be so great that all other loves are hatred by comparison. Actually, the most difficult clause in this passage is the expression, “yea, and his own life also.” Self-love is one of the stubbornest hindrances to discipleship. Not until we are willing to lay down our very lives for Him are we in the place where He wants us.

2. A denial of self.

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself...” (Matthew 16:24). Denial of self is not the same as self-denial. The latter means foregoing certain foods, pleasures, or possessions. But denial of self means such complete submission to the lordship of Christ that self has no rights or authority at all. It means that self abdicates the throne. It is expressed in the words of Henry Martyn, “Lord, let me have no will of my own, or consider my true happiness as depending in the smallest degree on anything that can befall me outwardly, but as consisting altogether in conformity to Thy will.”

My glorious Victor, Prince divine,
Clasp these surrendered hands in Thine,
At length my will is all thine own,
Glad vassals of a Savior's throne.

H. G. C. Moule

3. A deliberate choosing of the cross.

“If any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross...” (Matthew 16:24). The cross is not some physical infirmity or mental anguish; these things are common to all men. The cross is a pathway that is deliberately chosen. It is “a path which so far as this world goes is one of dishonor and reproach”—C. A. Coates. The cross symbolizes the shame, persecution and abuse which the world heaped upon the Son of God, and which the world will heap on all who choose to stand against the tide. Any believer can avoid the cross simply by being conformed to the world and its ways.

4. A life spent in following Christ.

“If any man come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). To understand what this means, one need simply ask himself, “What characterized the life of the Lord Jesus?” It was a life of obedience to the will of God. It was a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a life of unselfish service for others. It was a life of patience and longsuffering in the face of the gravest wrongs. It was a life of zeal, of expenditure, of self-control, of meekness, of kindness, of faithfulness and of devotion (Galatians 5:22, 23). In order to be His disciples, we must walk as He walked. We must exhibit the fruit of Christ-likeness (John 15:8).

5. A fervent love for all who belong to Christ.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). This is the love that esteems others better than oneself. It is the love that suffers long and is kind. It vaunts not itself and is not puffed up. It does not behave itself unseemly; seeks not its own, is not easily provoked; thinks no evil. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Without this love, discipleship would be a cold, legalistic asceticism.

6. An unswerving continuance in His Word.

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31). For real discipleship there must be continuance. It is easy enough to start well, to burst forth in a blaze of glory. But the test of reality is endurance to the end. Any man who looks back after putting his hand to the plow is not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). Spasmodic obedience to the Scriptures will not do. Christ wants those who will follow Him in constant, unquestioning obedience.

Keep me from turning back.
The handles of my plough with tears are wet,
The shears with rust are spoiled, and yet, and yet,
My God! My God! Keep me from turning back.

7. A forsaking of all to follow Him.

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). This is perhaps the most unpopular of all Christ’s terms of discipleship, and may well prove to be the most unpopular verse in the Bible. Clever theologians can give you a thousand reasons why it does not mean what it says, but simple disciples drink it down eagerly, assuming that the Lord Jesus knew what He was saying. What is meant by forsaking all? It means an abandonment of all one’s material possessions that are not absolutely essential and that could be used in the spread of the gospel. The man who forsakes all does not become a shiftless loafer; he works hard to provide for the current necessities of his family and himself. But since the passion of his life is to advance the cause of Christ, he invests everything above current needs in the work of the Lord and leaves the future with God. In seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, he believes that he will never lack food and clothing. He cannot conscientiously hold on to surplus funds when souls are perishing for want of the gospel. He does not want to waste his life accumulating riches that will fall into the devil’s hands when Christ returns for His saints. He wants to obey the Lord’s injunction against laying up treasure on earth. In forsaking all, he offers what he cannot keep anyway, and what he has ceased to love.

These then are the seven terms of Christian discipleship. They are clear and unequivocal. The writer realizes that in the act of setting them forth, he has condemned himself as an unprofitable servant. But shall the truth of God be forever suppressed because of the failure of God’s people? Is it not true that the message is always greater than the messenger? Is it not proper that God be true and every man a liar? Should we not say with an old worthy, “Thy will be done though in my own undoing.”

Confessing our past failure, let us courageously face up to the claims of Christ upon us and seek henceforth to be true disciples of our glorious Lord.

My Master, lead me to Thy door:
Pierce this now willing ear once more,
Thy bonds are freedom; let me stay
With thee to toil, endure, obey.

The Terms Of Discipleship

H. G. C. Moule

The Word of God is Living and Active

William MacDonald:

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.” (Heb. 4:12a NASB)

A Christian university student was witnessing to another student who was from a liberal seminary. When the believer quoted a verse, the seminarian said, “I don’t believe the Bible.” The Christian quoted another verse, only to be met with “I told you I don’t believe the Bible.” The third time the Christian quoted a verse the seminarian became agitated and exploded, “Don’t quote the Bible to me. I’ve already told you I don’t believe it.” By then the believer felt completely frustrated and defeated. He figured that he was a total failure as a soul winner.

It so happened that Dr. H. A. Ironside was a guest at his home that night. At the supper table, the Christian student shared his disappointing experience about the seminarian. Then he asked Dr. Ironside, “When you are trying to witness to someone and he says to you, ‘I don’t believe the Bible,’ what do you do?” Dr. Ironside replied with a happy smile, “I just quote more of it.”

That is excellent advice for any would-be soul winners. When people say they don’t believe the Bible, just quote more of it. The Word of God is living and powerful. It has an effect on people even when they don’t believe it.

Suppose two men are dueling. One says to the other, “I don’t believe your sword is real steel.” What happens? Does the second man lay down his sword and admit defeat? Or does he give a scientific discourse on the carbon content and malleability of the metal? Ridiculous! He gives his opponent a good sharp jab and lets him feel how real the sword is. So it is with the Bible. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. It needs to be used more than it needs to be defended. It is well able to defend itself.

I do not deny that there is a place for proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Such proofs serve a valuable purpose in confirming the faith of those who are already saved. In a few cases they help people come to saving faith. But generally speaking people aren’t convinced by human reasonings or arguments. “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” Men need to be confronted with the powerful Word of God. A single verse of Scripture is worth a thousand arguments.

This highlights the importance of Scripture memorization. If I haven’t committed verses to memory, the Spirit will not be able to bring them forth at the appropriate time. But the main point is that God has not promised to honor my words, but He has promised to honor His own. So in dealing with the unsaved, I must use the sword of the Spirit generously and watch it produce conviction and conversion by a miracle of grace.

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man**William MacDonald:**

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death. " Proverb 14:12

Twice in the book of Proverbs (14:12 and 16:25) we learn that man's judgment as to the right way is not reliable. What seems right to him ends in disaster and death.

During World War II the Navy gave a vivid illustration of this to its flight personnel. It was trying to impress on them that when they were flying at high altitudes and did not use their oxygen, they could not trust their senses. A pilot was instructed to enter a decompression chamber and sit down at a table on which was a sheet of mathematical problems. Oxygen was withdrawn from the chamber to simulate high altitudes. When the air became less dense, the pilot was told to solve the problems. He was also told that no one had done so correctly so far.

The pilot would breeze through the problems with utmost confidence that he had beaten the system. The problems seemed easy, and he had every assurance that he would receive a perfect score. There was no doubt in his mind about it.

But when oxygen was fed back into the chamber, and he emerged to have his paper corrected, he learned that his ability to solve problems had been seriously impaired by the lack of oxygen getting to his brain. The lesson was, of course, that if he flew at high altitudes without using his oxygen, he wouldn't be able to trust his own judgment, and he would be inviting a crash.

Man's judgment has been seriously impaired by sin. He feels absolutely sure that the way to heaven is by doing the best he can. If you tell him that no one has ever been saved by good works, he still has every confidence that he will be the first to beat the system. He is certain that God would never turn him away from the gates of heaven.

But he is wrong, and if he persists in his lack of "spiritual oxygen", he will perish. His safety lies in trusting the Word of God rather than his own judgment. If he does so, he will repent of his sins and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Because God's Word is truth, those who believe it can be confident that they are following the right route.

William MacDonald:

THE DEACONS

In our study of bishops, we learned that their function is the spiritual care and oversight of the house of God. We noted that bishops are also called elders, and that there are several bishops in one church, rather than one bishop over several churches.

We come next to the study of deacons, who they are and what their functions are.

1. What Are Deacons?

The word "deacon" simply means a servant—a man who pursues some ministry or service. Frequently in the New Testament it is used in this very general sense. For instance, a duly appointed civil official who rules in public affairs is called a deacon of God (Romans 13:4). Phebe is spoken of as a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Christ Himself is described as a deacon of the circumcision for the truth of God (Romans 15:8). The name has come to be applied to the seven men who were chosen in Acts 6:1-7, to take care of the disbursing of funds. The English word "deacon" is not found in that passage, and the word cannot be restricted to duties attending the administration of funds. It applies to any form of service, as is implied in the word "serve" (diakonein) in verse 2.

2. Their Qualifications

Although the exact duties of deacons are nowhere specified, yet their qualifications are given with great explicitness in 1 Timothy 3. Beginning with verse 8, we read: "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The first requirement is gravity. A man who is lightheaded and frivolous will not be likely to gain the confidence of those whom he serves. Then the deacon must not be double-tongued. That is, he must be consistent. He must not give one account to certain individuals and a different version to others. Honesty and straightforwardness are mandatory. Especially if his service involves handling funds, he should use such methods as will avoid the slightest possibility of suspicion or distrust. He must not be given to much wine. No one can place confidence in an intemperate person. Experience teaches that intemperance and excess are the enemies of accuracy and dependability. They ruin a man's testimony for God and unfit him for divine service. Also, he must not be greedy of filthy lucre. (Many of these requirements are identical with those of a bishop.) An avaricious spirit is a snare. If a man's heart is set on accumulating wealth, he can become so obsessed with this passion that every other activity in his life is made subservient to it. The Kingdom of God and His righteousness no longer hold first place in his life, and work for God is shoddy and unacceptable. The deacon must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. This is important. It is not enough for him to know the truth. He must practice the truth with a conscience void of offense toward God. Hymenaeus and Alexander both knew the Word of God, but they trifled with sin—that is, with evil doctrine (2 Timothy 2:17). They drowned out the voice of conscience and made shipwreck of the faith (1 Timothy 1:19, 20). There is no substitute for a tender conscience, one which is prompt to discern that which is displeasing to God, and to take sides with the Lord against it. Next we read, "Let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." This is a divine principle of considerable importance. "Let these also first be proved." In another passage, we read, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Timothy 5:22). It is a needed admonition for all of us. We are all prone to be impressed with a person the first time we meet him. We immediately want to advance him to a position of responsibility. Then after a time, we realize that it was a rash act. "All that glitters is not gold." We judged him on too short a notice. The next qualification of deacons seems rather to deal with their wives. It reads, in the King James Version, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." However, we feel that J. N. Darby's translation is more to the point. It reads, "The women in like manner grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." The point is that the women referred to are not the wives of deacons, but rather those who are themselves deaconesses. Phebe was a deaconess (servant) (Romans 16: 1). It would be difficult to understand why there should be special requirements for wives of deacons, when no such requirements are found for wives of bishops. However, there is no difficulty if it be

understood that the verse applies to women who are serving the local church. As in the case of elders, we learn that a deacon must be the husband of one wife, ruling his own children and his own house well. We have already been reminded that if a man does not command respect and authority in his own home, it is hardly possible that he can do so in the church.

3. Their Rewards

Now the reward of the deacon is twofold. If a man serves well as a deacon, he purchases to himself a good degree. He gains for himself a good standing among his fellow saints and a good prospect of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. Secondly, he purchases to himself great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. True, the world looks upon such a goal as of little value. It is too mystical, intangible, vague. But to the child of God, it is more valuable than gold or precious stones.

With regard to the support of deacons, the same thing applies as in the case of bishops. There are some who engage in secular work, and who, therefore, provide for their own needs. Others devote themselves wholly to the work of the Lord and for all such the principle is: "They which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14), "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Galatians 6:6).

4. Conclusion

Now in closing our study on deacons, we should like to refer once again to Philippians 1:1. There we find three types of people mentioned as being in the church of God—saints, bishops and deacons. It is noteworthy that those are the only classes named. Saints first, then bishops, then deacons. The absence of another class known as the clergy is noteworthy, as has been pointed out by Barnes in his Commentary on the New Testament: "There are not 'three orders' of clergy in the New Testament. The apostle Paul in this chapter (1 Timothy 3) expressly designates the characteristics of those who should have charge of the church, but mentions only two, 'bishops, and 'deacons'—there is no 'third' order. There is no allusion to anyone who was to be 'superior' to the 'bishops' and 'deacons.' As the apostle Paul was expressly given instructions in regard to the organization of the church, such an omission is unaccountable if he supposed there was to be an order of 'prelates' in the church. Why is there no allusion to them? Why is there no mention of their qualifications? If Timothy was himself a prelate, was he to have nothing to do in transmitting the office to others? Were there no peculiar qualifications required in such an order of men which it would be proper to mention? Would it not be respectful, at least, in Paul to have made some allusion to such an office, if Timothy himself held it?"

The answer is, of course, that if the organization of the New Testament church contained any other order than bishops and deacons, then Paul would have mentioned it. The vast ecclesiastical systems of our day have been added by men, with no warrant whatever from the Word of God.

THE CHURCH'S FINANCES

Throughout the New Testament, it is both stated and implied that the church receives its finances from those who are within. There is no hint of any unsaved persons outside the church contributing to its support. Christian giving is an act of worship and is thus limited to those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Neither is there any hint of a local church being regularly financed, subsidized, or supported by any other church, group of churches, or council. There were special adverse circumstances, such as the Judean famine (AGts 11:29) occasioning practical financial fellowship being shown by some churches to fellow-believers. Every local church should be self supporting. The major teachings of the New Testament with regard to this important subject of the church's finances may readily be outlined.

1. Who Owns What?

All that a Christian has belongs to God. The believer is to act as a steward, using all he has in the best possible way for his Master's glory. (See Luke 16:1-12.) F. B. Meyer stated the truth as follows: "We are meant to be stewards; not storing up our Lord's money for ourselves, but administering for Him all that we do not need for the maintenance of ourselves and our dear ones, in the position of life in which God has placed us. And our only worldly aim should be to lay out our Lord's money to the very best advantage; so that we may render Him an account with joy, when He comes to reckon with us."

2. When and Where to Give

The Christian is instructed to give to the work of the Lord. When is he to give? “Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store” (1 Corinthians 16:2). How much is he to give? He is to give “as God has prospered him” (1 Corinthians 16: 2) and as Christ gave. He was rich, but became poor that we might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He is our example. We should give out of our want, not out of our abundance (Mark 12:44). In short, the Christian should give liberally. The tithe (one tenth) was the minimum given by an Israelite. He brought tithes and offerings. No Christian should be content to give, under grace, what was the minimum requirement under law.

3. How to Give

In what spirit is he to give? He should first give himself to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5), thus acknowledging that all belongs to Him. Giving must be done in love (1 Corinthians 13:3), else it is valueless. It should be done in secret (Matthew 6:1-4)-so secret that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, to use a figure of speech. It should be done cheerfully, not grudgingly (2 Corinthians 9:7). We find that the early Christians sold their possessions and shared their wealth with one another (Acts 2:44, 45; 4:31-37). This was an outward expression of their true spiritual fellowship. Such action is nowhere commanded in the New Testament. In fact, the instructions of Scripture concerning Christian giving presuppose private ownership of property. The action by the early church was purely voluntary. While it is not to be confused with monasticism or with the “communism” of today, the implication is clear. When believers are controlled by the Holy Spirit, they will be generous in giving to every genuine case of need as He may direct.

4. The Reward

What are the rewards for giving? When we are faithful in the unrighteous mammon (in the use of our money), God will commit true riches (spiritual treasures) to our trust (Luke 16:11). Fruit abounds to the account of the giver (Philippians 4:17). He will have treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21), because his gifts are “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18).

5. The Assembly Treasurer

Those who handle the funds of the church should use business methods that are above reproach. “Provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21). At least two men should be appointed to take charge of the offering. In Acts 6:1-6 we read that seven men were appointed to handle the distribution of funds to widows in the assembly. The Epistles contain no definite instructions as to exactly how many men should handle the money, but it is clear from 1 Corinthians 16:3, 4 and 2 Corinthians 8:18, 19 that it was customary to entrust this responsibility to more than one. In the former passage, Paul states that he would send those whom the Corinthians approved with the offering to Jerusalem, and, if necessary, he would go, too. Note the plurals-“them” (verse 3); “they” (verse 4). In the latter reference, Paul explains that another brother was chosen to travel with him in distributing the gift from the church.

6. The Giving of the Local Church

The New Testament reveals three principal purposes for which the funds of the church are expended. These are for widows in the assembly, for poor saints and for those who devote their time to preaching and teaching the Word.

For widows in the assembly (Acts 6:1-6). In order to qualify as a “widow indeed” (1 Timothy 5:3-16), a woman had to meet the following requirements. (1) She had to be desolate; that is, without any relatives who could support her, and utterly cast upon the Lord for her needs (vv. 4,5,16). (2) She had to be at least sixty years old. (3) She had to be known for her good works, her noble motherhood, her hospitality, and her charity (see v. 10). For the poor saints. God has exhorted us many times in His Word to remember the poor (e.g., Galatians 2:10; Romans 12:13); and the prosperity of His people in the Old Testament is closely linked with their treatment of

their needy brethren (Deuteronomy 14:29). Around AD. 45, many of the Christians in Judea were stricken with poverty. This was probably due to severe persecution and widespread famine. The saints in Antioch sent relief to the Judean brethren by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30). The assembly at Corinth was urged to do the same thing (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). We are likewise responsible to care for those in need. The Lord Jesus said, "Ye have the poor with you always," (Mark 14:7). It is good for an assembly to have poor members whom it can care for with a godly exercise. Barnes points out that a great way to unite Christians and to prevent alienation and jealousy and strife is to have a common object of charity, in which all are interested and to which all may contribute. The assembly is not, however, responsible for those who are poor because they do not want to work. In such cases the divine decree is that, if any man will not work, neither shall he eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). For those who devote their time to the work of the Lord. It is a divine principle that those who preach the Gospel or teach the Word are entitled to the support of the saints. "Let him who is receiving instruction in the Word give ungrudgingly a share of his worldly goods to him who instructs him" (Galatians 6:6, Way's Translation). (See also 1 Corinthians 9:4-13; 1 Timothy 5:17,18.) Oftentimes, however, the Apostle Paul labored with his hands, rather than accept fellowship from assemblies (Acts 18:3). His reasons for this were simple. He wanted to serve as an example to the Ephesians, that they, too, might support the weak and know the blessedness of giving (Acts 20:33-35). He also wished to prevent his critics in Corinth from charging him with mercenary motives (2 Corinthians 11:7-12). In addition he desired to prevent the Thessalonian believers from being burdened with his support (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). The saints there were poor and were being persecuted. The assembly at Philippi was commended for ministering to Paul (Philippians 4:10-19). Note that Paul did not desire the fellowship because of his need, but because he wanted fruit to abound to their account. Note, also, that although the Apostle never publicized his personal needs, he did not hesitate to make known the needs of other saints (2 Corinthians 8 and 9). There is, thus, a difference between information and solicitation. As Dr. Chafer has pointed out—"All will agree that information is required, else no intelligent giving is possible; but the real problem centers around the question of solicitation."

7. Conclusion

The reader of the New Testament will notice how delightfully simple is the financing of the Church. There are no burdensome, legalistic rules, neither is there an elaborate, complex financial organization. If the simple precepts of the Scripture were followed, two important results would ensue. The needs of the Church would be liberally supplied without solicitations. The Church would not have to be reproached by the world as a moneymaking institution.

William MacDonald:

"If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it. " 1John 14:14

God answers prayer. He answers it exactly the same way we would if we had infinite wisdom, love and power. Sometimes He gives us what we want, sometimes He gives us something better, but always what we need. Sometimes He answers our prayers quickly; at other times He teaches us to wait patiently.

God answers prayer; sometimes when hearts are weak,
He gives the very gifts His children seek.
But often faith must learn a deeper rest,
And trust God's silence when He cannot speak;
For He whose name is love will send the best.
Stars may burn out, nor mountain walls endure,
But God is true, His promises are sure
To those who seek.

There are conditions to prayer. Often what seems like a blank check ("if ye ask anything") has conditions attached ("in My Name"). Individual prayer promises must be considered in the light of all other Scriptures on the subject.

There are mysteries to prayer. It is easy to think up all kinds of questions about the "whys" and "wherefores." But, for the most part, they are not edifying. It is better to pray and to see God work than to solve all the mysteries connected with prayer. I like what Archbishop Temple said: "When I pray, coincidences happen. When I do not, they don't."

When we pray to God in the Name of the Lord Jesus, it is just the same as if He were making those requests to the Father. This is what gives such significance and power to our prayers. And this is why we never come closer to omnipotence than when we pray. Of course, we will never be omnipotent, even in eternity. But when we pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus, we lay hold on infinite power.

The best prayer comes from a strong, inward necessity. This means that the more we are dependent on the Lord, the more effective our prayer life will be.

When we pray, we see things happen that would never happen according to the laws of chance or probability. Our lives crackle with the supernatural. They become radioactive with the Holy Spirit. And when we touch other lives, something happens for God.

We should be like the saint who said, "I measure my influence by the number who need my prayers and the number who pray for me."

Through Faith we Understand

William MacDonald:

“Through faith we understand...” (Heb. 11:3)

“Through faith we understand...” These words embody one of the most basic principles of spiritual life. We believe God’s Word first, then we understand. The world says, “Seeing is believing;” God says, “Believing is seeing.” The Lord Jesus said to Martha, “Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see...” (John 11:40). Later He said to Thomas, “...blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). And the Apostle John wrote, “These things have I written unto you that believe...that ye may know...” (1 John 5:13). Believe first, then you’ll know.

Billy Graham tells how this principle came alive in his life: “In 1949 I had been having a great many doubts concerning the Bible. I thought I saw apparent contradictions in Scriptures. Some things I could not reconcile with my restricted concept of God. When I stood up to preach, the authoritative note so characteristic of all great preachers of the past was lacking. Like hundreds of other seminary students, I was waging the intellectual battle of my life. The outcome could certainly affect my future ministry.

“In August of that year I had been invited to Forest Home, Presbyterian conference center high in the mountains outside Los Angeles. I remember walking down a trail, tramping into the woods, and almost wrestling with God. I dueled with my doubts, and my soul seemed to be caught in the crossfire. Finally, in desperation, I surrendered my will to the living God revealed in Scripture. I knelt before the open Bible and said, ‘Lord, many things in this book I do not understand. But thou hast said, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ All I have received from Thee, I have taken by faith. Here and now, by faith, I accept the Bible as Thy Word. I take it all. I take it without reservations. Where there are things I cannot understand, I will reserve judgment until I receive more light. If this pleases Thee, give me authority as I proclaim Thy Word, and through that authority convict men of sin and turn sinners to the Saviour!

“Within six weeks we started our Los Angeles crusade, which is now history. During that crusade I discovered the secret that changed my ministry. I stopped trying to prove that the Bible was true. I had settled in my own mind that it was and this faith was conveyed to the audience.”

Through Pressures We Grow

William MacDonald:

“In pressure thou hast enlarged me.” (Psa. 4:1 Darby)

It is true that “calm seas never made a sailor.” It is through tribulation that we develop patience. It is through pressure that we are enlarged.

Even men of the world have realized that difficulties have educative and broadening values. Charles Kettering once said, “Problems are the price of progress. Don’t bring me anything but problems. Good news weakens me.”

But especially from the Christian world come testimonies to the profit derived from trials.

We read, for instance, “To suffer passes, but to have suffered endures for eternity.”

The poet adds this confirmation:

And many a rapturous minstrel among those sons of light
Will say of his sweetest music, “I learnt it in the night;”
And many a rolling anthem that fills the Father’s home
Sobbed out its first rehearsal in the shade of a darkened room.

Spurgeon wrote, in his inimitable way:

“I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the file? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house.”

And yet why should we be surprised? Does not the unnamed writer to the Hebrews tell us, “Now obviously no ‘chastening’ seems pleasant at the time: it is in fact most unpleasant. Yet when it is all over we can see that it has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the character of those who have accepted it” (Heb. 12:11, Phillips).

To What Should We Be Loyal

William MacDonald:

What do you think of the person who says, "My parents were members of this denomination. I was born in it. And I'll die in it."

"Oh," you say, "I think he's wrong to talk like that:" "Yes, but why is he wrong?"

"I suppose because he assumes his denomination is right and will always be right."

"Well, then, to what denomination or group should he be loyal?"

"I guess he shouldn't be loyal to any denomination, because no denomination is perfect."

"One final question. If he shouldn't be loyal to any denomination or group of Christians, to what should he be loyal?"

"He ought to be loyal to the Lord and to the principles of His Word."

Yes, of course! That is the only correct answer. It is a mistake to develop an undying loyalty to any Christian fellowship, no matter how scriptural it may be at the time.

Even suppose that you reject the whole idea of denominations. Suppose you meet with Christians who refuse any sectarian name. Suppose, for instance, that they speak of themselves by the innocuous name of "the assemblies." They seek to adhere to the teaching of the Word. Shouldn't you throw in your lot with them permanently and be loyal to them alone?

If you do, you will find yourself in a difficult position.

You are committed to a group that will almost inevitably change over the years. This has been the history of almost every Christian fellowship. Liberal tendencies creep in. Zeal and freshness give way to formalism. A denominational hierarchy develops. Soon you can write Ichabod over the whole thing-the glory has departed.

Then again, if you are loyal to a group of assemblies, the question always arises, "With which particular ones do you agree?" There are wide differences among any group of local churches, just as there are wide differences among individuals. Some are open, some are exclusive. Some are conservative, some are liberal. Some have a pastor who presides over the congregation, others repudiate a one-man ministry. No two assemblies are exactly alike.

So there is a real problem. To which assemblies are we to be loyal? Are we to blindly subscribe to all the assemblies that might be listed in a semi-official address book? It seems obvious that we cannot consistently do this. We must judge each individual assembly by the Word of God, as far as our own personal affiliation is concerned.

Here is another problem. If my loyalty is to a particular group of local churches, what is to be my attitude toward other Christian groups that might in some ways be closer to the New Testament pattern than mine is? How do I evaluate them? Do I simply wave them off by saying, "They are not among 'our' assemblies." Do I accept or reject them by whether their activities are reported in one of "our" magazines?

Then there is the matter of individual Christian workers "outside our circle." How do we evaluate them? Do we ask, "Has he been commended by one of 'the assemblies?'" "Is he with us?" Or do we inquire if he is serving the Lord in accordance with the principles of the New Testament?

Certainly the easiest policy is to judge individuals or groups by whether or not they are "with us." This does not require spiritual exercise or discernment. But it is a false and dangerous basis of judgment. It supplants the Word of God as our final authority. It assumes a priori that "we" are correct in our position and that everyone else should conform to us. It leads to inconsistency, embarrassment and confusion.

Christians must be taught to test everything by the Scriptures. This is our only authority. The question is not, "How do we do it in 'our assemblies?'" but "What does the Bible teach about it?"

Our loyalty must be first, last and always to the Lord and to the principles of His Word. And we should never

blindly assume that any group of believers has a monopoly on the truth, is adhering to the New Testament in its entirety, or is immune from drift and departure.

Every generation must guard against the danger of slipping into denominational, sectarian ways of thinking. Down through the centuries, there have been great movements of the Holy Spirit in which certain truths have been recovered out of the rubble of tradition, formalism and ritualism. The first generation, that is, those living at the time of these movements have been intelligent concerning the scriptural principles involved. But then the second and third generations have tended to follow the system routinely because their parents were in it, and because they themselves were brought up in it. There has been a decline of true conviction and an increasing ignorance of the biblical basis of the pattern followed.

Thus the history of most spiritual movements has been aptly described in the word series: man ... movement ... machine . . . monument. At the outset there is a man, anointed in a special way by the Holy Spirit. As others are led into the truth, a movement develops. But by the second or third generation, people are following a system with sectarian, machine-like precision. Eventually nothing is left but a lifeless, denominational monument.

If you were to ask a sampling of Christians, "Why do you meet in church fellowship where you do?" how many do you think could give a clear, scriptural answer? Not many! There is widespread ignorance as to the truth of the New Testament church, and therefore a general lack of conviction on the subject. How can we have strong convictions about something we do not know or understand?

In a healthy New Testament assembly, those who are in fellowship know why they are there. They are not sermon-tasters or followers of men, but Christians who are well grounded in the truth of the gospel and of the Church. They are prepared to judge everything by the Word. They are not unalterably committed to any particular group of assemblies. If trends develop which are unbiblical and dishonoring to the Lord, they will seek the leading of the Holy Spirit to the company of those who do meet in obedience to the Bible.

Let us examine some of the great truths concerning the assembly which are found in the New Testament and to which we should be loyal.

UNITY OF THE BODY

One of the most obvious truths is the unity of the body of Christ. There is only one body, one church, one assembly (Eph. 4:4).

Because this is true, all believers are responsible to bear witness to it. As we gather together, we should give practical expression to it. Nothing that we do or say should deny it.

Many Christians see quite clearly that sects and denominations are a denial of the truth of the one body (I Cor. 1: 10-13; 3:3). Sects create the impression that Christ is divided, and thus misrepresent the truth of God's Word. Many of us see this quite clearly and refuse such names as Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist or Episcopalian.

But we do not always see that any name that separates us from other members of the body is divisive and unscriptural. Even if we take a biblical name like brethren, for example, the minute we qualify it or capitalize it, we transgress. It is as wrong for some believers to identify themselves as Plymouth Brethren, United Brethren, Christian Brethren, Evangelical Brethren, Open Brethren or Exclusive Brethren as it is for others to call themselves Presbyterians or Pentecostals.

Brethren with a capital B implies that there are some believers who are not brethren, or that some are brethren in a distinctive way. We hear people ask, "Is he in the Brethren?" or they report sadly, "He left the Brethren."

The truth is, of course, that if he's saved, he's in the brethren, and he can't leave the brethren since the believer is eternally secure.

It is certainly right that we should gather to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, but the minute we speak of ourselves as "Christians gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone," meaning that we do and others don't, we have become a sect.

To speak of any particular group of Christians exclusively as "the Lord's people" betrays a sectarian attitude. It puts us in the same class as those in Corinth who said, "I am of Christ"-meaning that they were of Christ to the exclusion of all others (I Cor. 1: 12).

Another way in which inconsistency appears is the habit of calling a particular gathering of Christians in a town

"the assembly" in that town. Or speaking of states and cities where there are "no assemblies." Actually this is not accurate language. The assembly in any given town is made up of all true believers there. Within that town there may be several gatherings of Christians. In addition there may be some true Christians who are not associated with a local fellowship for one reason or another; they may be under discipline, for instance. All go to make up the assembly in the town, though all may not meet together in one place.

Someone will say, "Well, how can I distinguish my assembly from the other evangelical churches in Hometown?" The answer is, "Instead of calling it 'the assembly' in Hometown, refer to it as the assembly that meets in the Bible Chapel at 5th and Pine." Then you have not denied the unity of the body.

We must never forget that we are Christians, believers, brethren, disciples and saints-and so are all who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. To deny this by any form of sectarianism, denominationalism or exclusivism is to deny the truth of the Bible and to be guilty of carnality and pride.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE MEMBERS

A second great truth for which we should stand is that all true believers are members of the body of Christ and therefore members of one another (I Cor. 12:12-26). This being so, it is necessary for us to recognize all Christians as our brothers and sisters.

It is not always easy to do this. Men have erected fences. People are more loyal to their own denomination than they are to the body of Christ. They do not recognize the unity of the Spirit.

But the trouble is not all with other people. Even in our own hearts, there is often the desire to be distinctive, to think of ourselves as having a cover on church truth or some other truth. We often find it difficult to befriend those who do not see exactly as we do. Instead of rejoicing when others are led into a certain measure of divine truth, we are apt to magnify the ways in which they are still different from us. And too frequently we quarrel most bitterly with those whose church order is strikingly similar to our own.

How then can we give practical expression to the truth that all genuine believers are members of the body of Christ?

First of all, we should love them because they belong to Christ (I John 4:11). The fact that they may differ with us in various areas of doctrine or practice should not prevent our loving them.

We should pray for them (I Sam. 12:23). This is a debt we owe to all men, especially those who are of the household of faith.

Third, we should seek to share with them the precious truths which God has shown us from the Word (II Tim. 2:2).

This does not mean that we should adopt a deliberate policy of sheep-stealing, that is, moving into other evangelical groups with the specific purpose of leading people out to "our own fellowship." Nowhere in the Bible are we called to this divisive ministry. Rather, in our individual contact with others and as led by the Holy Spirit, we should minister Christ to them as the gathering Center of His people. We should ""teach everyone we can, all that we know about Him, so that, if possible, we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ" (Col. 1:28, Phillips).

Not only should we love other believers, and pray for them, and seek to edify them, but we should also learn from them (I Cor. 12:21). It is a mistake to think that we have all the truth and that we cannot benefit spiritually from those outside "our own fellowship." Every member has something to contribute to the rest of the body. Any man-made barriers that hinder believers from helping other believers are contrary to the will of God.

Also we should refrain from criticism, jealousy, gossiping, backbiting or judging (Luke 6:37). Each believer is a steward of the Lord. We are distinctly forbidden to judge others before the time, that is, before the Lord comes (I Cor. 4:5). Paul asks, 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own Master he standeth or falleth' (Rom. 14:4). And when Peter became concerned about John's service for the Lord, Jesus said, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me" (John 21:22).

We should rejoice whenever Christ is preached, whether or not we agree with the methods and motives. Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will; the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in

pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice' (Phil. 1: 15-18).

The fact that we thus recognize all true believers as members of the body does NOT mean that we will adopt their policies and practices. We are responsible to obey the Word of God as He has revealed it to us. We can love people without loving the system in which they are found and without becoming a part of it. As far as our own pathway is concerned, we must be uncompromisingly obedient to the Bible. As far as other believers are concerned, we should be patient and tolerant.

CHRIST, THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

A third important truth for which we must stand is that Christ is the Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1: 18). This means that we must look to Him for direction and guidance in the affairs of the local assembly.

We all realize that the truth of Christ's headship is denied when a pope, for instance, claims to be head of the church on earth. But we must guard against the more subtle error of thinking that any of us has any right to manage the affairs of the assembly. It is so easy to give lip service to the Headship of Christ, and yet to maneuver, lobby and connive in a carnal way in order to get one's own way. Instead of waiting upon Him in fasting and prayer, we apply successful business methods and the wisdom of this world. All this is a practical denial of the Headship of Christ. If Christ is Head, then everything must be done under His guidance and control.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Then there is a fourth truth-the truth that all true believers are priests. In I Peter 2:5-9, we learn that we are holy priests and royal priests.

As holy priests we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ (v. 5). These sacrifices include:

- the sacrifice of our bodies (Rom. 12:1, 2).
- the sacrifice of our praise (Heb. 13:15).
- the sacrifice of our possessions (Heb. 13:16).

As royal priests we show forth the excellencies of Him Who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (I Peter 2:9). This means that every believer is expected to witness for Christ, both by life and by the spoken word.

As holy priests we go into the sanctuary to worship. As royal priests we go out- into the world to testify.

The idea that worship and service are the functions of a special group known as priests or clergymen is foreign to the New Testament. All believers are priests and should be free to exercise their priestly functions.

NO ONE-MAN MINISTRY

There are some local churches that repudiate the clerical system, refusing to have what might be called a one-man ministry. And yet if you were to ask many of the Christians in those churches for a scriptural defense of their position, they would be hard put to give an answer. Why is it wrong to have a one-man ministry in the local assembly?

The first reason is because it is not found in the New Testament. The assemblies in apostolic times consisted of saints, bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1). The bishops, or elders, are always spoken of in the plural. Not one elder over a church, but several elders in each church. Bible historians agree that the clerical system arose in the second century; it was not found in the churches of the New Testament.

Secondly, the clerical system generally ignores the purpose for which the gifts of evangelist, pastor and teacher were given to the church. The function of these gifts is to build up the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). In other words, Christian service is not the function of any one class but the responsibility of all believers. It is only as each one fulfills his function that the body will develop and mature. The function of the gifts listed in Eph. 4:11 is to build up the saints to the point where they are mature, functioning members of the body. Thus, these particular gifts are temporary aids, not permanent fixtures.

When one man is responsible for all the teaching and preaching in a local church, there is always the danger that people will gather to him, not to the Lord. If a man is especially gifted, people are drawn to his preaching. They attend because he is there. If he leaves for any reason, then they are apt to follow him, or if this is not possible, they often drift elsewhere, looking for another gifted man.

Christ should be the gathering Center of His people (Matt. 18:20). We should be drawn by His presence, not by a

man. When believers see this and act upon it, the local assembly need not be shaken by the departure of any man. An assembly where Christians gather to Christ has strength, stability and solidarity.

And, of course, there are potential dangers when all or most of the teaching in a local church is done by one man. People tend to accept his word as authoritative. If they are not studying the Scriptures for themselves, they are not in a good position to discern error.

In addition, no one man is able to provide the diversity of ministry that is possible when the Holy Spirit has liberty to speak through several men. We must be concerned not only with ministry that is doctrinally accurate, but also with ministry that provides a balanced diet for the people of God. The scriptural injunction is, "Let the prophets speak two or three and let the others judge" (I Cor. 14:29).

A one-man ministry too often stifles the development of gift in a local church. There is not the same opportunity for others to participate. Some ministers insist on confining most of the work to themselves; they resent anyone else's intruding into their office. But even where this is not the case even where ministers would like to see others participating-the very nature of the clerical system discourages the so-called layman from developing his God-given gifts.

When one man is salaried by the local congregation as preacher, there is often a subtle temptation to water down the message. It should not be so, but the fact is that by controlling a minister's salary, the congregation often cuts itself off from receiving the full counsel of God.

Now we recognize that there are many great men of God in the clerical system who preach the gospel faithfully, teach the Word, and seek to shepherd the sheep of Christ. And God is using them.

We also recognize that there are many "one-man ministers" who do not have the clerical spirit. They have a sincere desire to help the saints in every possible way, to lead by example, and not to lord it over God's heritage.

And we also realize that it is possible for someone who is not a clergyman to have the clerical spirit. In III John 9-11, for example, we read of Diotrephes who acted as a tyrant in a local assembly.

But the fact remains that the clerical system is basically wrong and unscriptural. The world will never be evangelized in the way that God intended, and the church will never be built up according to the divine plan as long as the distinction between clergy and laity is maintained.

THE PRESIDENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Another vital truth which each local assembly is obligated to maintain and practice is the presidency of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26). This means that the Holy Spirit is the Representative of Christ in the church on earth. He is the One Who should be allowed to lead the people of God in prayer, praise and worship. He should have liberty to speak through servants of His own choosing according to the spiritual needs of God's people.

In I Cor. 14:26, we have a picture of a meeting of the early church in which there was this freedom of the Spirit. "How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying."

When the Spirit is thus free to lead, there will be spontaneity in teaching, preaching, worship and intercession.

Most of us realize that the ministry of the Holy Spirit has been greatly quenched by the introduction of ritual and liturgy. The use of printed prayers, of stereotyped messages for certain days of the "church calendar," of a prescribed order of service that must be followed without deviation-these things fetter the Holy Spirit in the meetings of the local church.

But we must guard against more subtle ways of quenching Him. For instance, we must guard against manmade rules in our worship meetings. In some places, there is an unwritten law that there must be no ministry before the breaking of bread. Or that the meeting must not go beyond a certain time. Or that in worshipping we must not dwell on our own sins or unworthiness. Or that we must sit or stand when praying or singing. All such rules quench the spirit of spontaneous worship and lead to formalism.

We often make a man an offender for a word. Perhaps a young believer will express thanks to God for dying for him. Must he be rebuked for this? We all know that God, the Father did not die. And doubtless the young believer knows it too. But in the self-consciousness of taking part publicly, he is apt to express himself poorly.

Should he be made ashamed of his first, faltering act of public worship? Is it not better to hear his sincere though faulty adoration than not to hear it at all?

Generally speaking we believe that the Holy Spirit will guide the worship of His people along a certain theme. But suppose a brother gives out a hymn that seems to be quite unrelated to this theme. Must he be embarrassed for this? Is it not better to sing the hymn and pray that as he matures sufficiently to discern the theme in the meeting, he will do so without losing any of his warmth and affection for the Lord?

Which reminds us of a certain preacher who was asked, "What would you do if some brother gave out a hymn that was obviously not in the Spirit?" He replied, "I'd sing it in the Spirit."

As we seek to give the Holy Spirit His proper place in the assembly, let us beware of rules that quench Him and that kill spontaneity and unaffected worship.

EACH ASSEMBLY INDEPENDENTLY RESPONSIBLE TO CHRIST

There is another principle in the Word of God that should guide us in connection with the assembly, namely that each assembly is independent and responsible only to Christ. There is no such thing in the New Testament as a denomination, a federation of churches, or a circle of fellowship. There is no headquarters on earth, exercising authority of any kind over local assemblies.

The headquarters of the church is where the Head is -in heaven.

Every local church should carefully avoid anything that might lead to centralized control on earth.

This centralization is the evil that has hastened the spread of modernism. The liberals have seized control of the denominational headquarters and of the seminaries. They knew that if they could control the headquarters, then eventually they could control all the churches.

The formation of a central group often comes from government pressure or from a desire to obtain certain benefits from the government. But then centralization makes it easy for totalitarian governments to suppress the church. If they capture a few denominational leaders, they can control the activities of the entire denomination.

God's will is that each assembly should be an independent unit, responsible directly to the Lord Jesus. This hinders the spread of error, and enables the church to go underground more easily in times of persecution.

THE ROLE OF THE GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

We have already touched briefly on the role of gifts in the Church. Actually every believer has some gift, some special function in the body of Christ. In addition there are the special service gifts of evangelist, pastor and teacher (Eph. 4: 11). The latter gifts were given to help all the saints find their gift and to exercise it. They were given to build up the saints for the work of the ministry, and thus for the building up of the body of Christ. From this it is clear that:

The work of the ministry is not for a special class of Christians but for all the people of God.

The work of the special gifts of Ephesians 4 is to build up Christians to the point where they can carry on by themselves, then to move on. In other words, the saints should not become perpetually dependent on such gifts. On the contrary these gifts should work themselves out of a job in the shortest possible time, then move on to new areas of opportunity. Just as parents begin right away to teach children to take care of themselves, so should these gifts teach the babes in Christ.

Now this raises a question: "How long should such a gift remain in a local assembly?" There is only one Possible answer to the question-as long as it takes to mature the saints to serve. Paul only stayed in Thessalonica "for three sabbath days" (Acts 17:2), yet left behind an indigenous assembly-self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. As far as the record is concerned, the longest that he stayed in any one place was the three years that he spent in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). It is not exactly a question of how long a man stays in one place, but rather what his purpose is. What is he trying to do? Is he trying to equip the saints to carry on by themselves?

In this regard, these gifts must guard against the natural tendency to nestle, to think of themselves as having a lifetime appointment in any one place. (This is as true of foreign missionaries as of workers in the homeland.) They must keep themselves mobile. And they must also guard against another subtle danger, that is the feeling that the saints couldn't get along without them. When they are absent, the attendance drops; this makes them

think that they must not leave. They are afraid that the whole assembly would go to pieces. It caters to pride to think that we are indispensable. And sometimes it wounds our pride to think that we are no longer needed in a particular place. Actually we should rejoice when that time arrives.

While speaking of gifts, there is something else that should be mentioned. In the New Testament, these gifts were charismatic, not professional. By this we mean that these gifts were men who were sovereignly endowed by the Holy Spirit without regard to training or occupation. For instance, the Spirit would reach down and equip a fisherman to be an evangelist. Or He might take a shepherd to teach His Word. Or He might fit a carpenter to exercise a pastoral ministry among the saints.

There is no suggestion in the New Testament that professional training can make a man a gift to the church. The idea that only men who have had formal schooling in the Word are qualified to minister is disgusting. Training can be helpful to a believer in getting a grasp of the Scriptures, but no amount of training can make a man an evangelist, a teacher or a pastor. And there is always the danger of professionalism. If the Scriptures are approached from a philosophical basis, then training can be a very deadening and dangerous thing.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

When is a local church a true New Testament Church? When most of the members are true believers? Even if only a minority are true believers? Wherever Christians are gathered in the Lord's Name? What qualifies a group to be considered a local assembly?

Actually the New Testament does not lay down hard and fast rules as to what an assembly is. It does state that where two or three are gathered in Christ's Name, He is in the midst (Matt. 18:20). And the Scriptures assume that those who compose the assembly are Christians, although it is also recognized that unbelievers are sometimes taken into the number unawares (Acts 20:29, 30). Also the New Testament seems to assume the presence of elders and deacons in the normal assembly (Phil. 1:1). But beyond that there is no final way for us to say that certain Christian groups are New Testament churches and that others are not. We can be grateful that we are not the judges in these cases.

If a group professes to be a Christian assembly, then it should manifest the truth of the church universal. It should be a miniature, a replica of the body of Christ. It should present a living portrayal of the church of the living God.

Now the situation among local churches in the world today is this. Some local assemblies depict the universal church very badly. Some do it more accurately. None does it perfectly. What you have is a wide range of churches with all different degrees of likeness to the universal church.

Some churches obviously have no right to be thought of as Christian assemblies. I am thinking of those liberal churches, for instance, that deny all the fundamental doctrines of the faith.

But then we have a wide variety of other churches that do acknowledge Jesus Christ as only Lord and Savior. Some are more evangelical than others. Who can say where the line is that divides those that are N. T. churches from those that are not? We have to leave them with the Lord. Our responsibility is to build according to the pattern, that is, to give a true likeness of the church in our own local assembly.

Certainly no assembly has any reason for pride. If we could see ourselves as the Lord sees us, we would probably shrivel up and die. Spiritual pride is itself a denial of the truth that we are seeking to uphold.

CONCLUSION

To what should we be loyal? Once again we emphasize that we should be loyal to the Scriptures, not to any church system or circle of fellowship. In a day of drift, we must constantly test everything by the Bible and act accordingly.

And there will be a price to pay. It costs something to follow New Testament principles. There will be reproach from the world and opposition from other Christians. But our responsibility is clear. We must obey God and leave the consequences with Him.

Training for Disciples

William MacDonald:

“The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.” (Lu. 6:40)

In this passage the Lord Jesus was reminding the Twelve that when they went out to disciple others, they could not expect their disciples to progress further in the spiritual life than they themselves had attained. In other words, the extent of our positive influence on others is limited by what we ourselves are. Or as O. L. Clark said:

You cannot teach what you do not know;
You cannot lead where you do not go.

The Savior went on to reinforce the lesson by the story of the mote and the beam. A man is walking by a threshing floor when a sudden gust of wind lands a tiny speck of chaff squarely in his eye. He rubs it, pulls the top lid down over the bottom one, and tries all the wellmeaning advice of his friends as to how to get the mote out of his eye. Then I come along with a telephone pole jutting out of my eye and say to him, “Here, my dear friend, let me help you get that atom out of your eye.” With his head at an angle, he looks up at me with his remaining good eye and says, “Don’t you think you ought to take the pole out of your own eye first?”

Of course! I can’t help someone who is struggling with a besetting sin if I am even more shackled by that particular sin. I can’t press on him obedience to some plain command of Scripture if I have not obeyed it myself. Any spiritual failure in my life seals my lips in that particular area.

When my disciple has become perfect, that is, when I have finished training him, I cannot expect him to be one centimeter above my own spiritual stature. He may progress up to my height, but I cannot lead him beyond it.

All of which emphasizes afresh that we must take heed to ourselves. Our ministry is to be a ministry of character. It’s what’s inside that counts. We may be eloquent, clever, and fast-talking but if there are blind-spots in our lives, areas of neglect and disobedience, then our discipling of others is a case of the blind leading the blind.

Triumph and Victory in Christ

William MacDonald:

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.” (2 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

It is generally understood that Paul here borrows a figure from the victory parade of a military leader just returned from a foreign conquest. The general is at the head of the parade, savoring the sweet satisfaction of victory. Behind him are his jubilant troops. Then behind them are the prisoners-of-war, slated for punishment, perhaps death. All along the parade route are incense burners, filling the air with aroma. But the aroma means different things to different people, depending on whose side they are on. To those who are loyal to the commander in chief, it is the fragrance of victory. To the captives, however, it is an omen of defeat and retribution.

The pathway of a servant of the Lord parallels this picture in several respects. The Lord always leads him in triumph. Though it might not always seem like victory, the fact is that he is on the winning side and God’s cause can never fail.

Everywhere he goes, he carries the aroma of Christ with him. But this aroma means different things to different people. To those who bow to the Lord Jesus, it is the scent of everlasting life. To those who refuse the Gospel, on the other hand, it is the smell of death and destruction.

But in both cases God is glorified. He is glorified in the salvation of the repentant, and he is also vindicated in the refusal of those who are perishing. When the latter stand before Christ, at the Judgment of the Great White Throne, they will not be able to blame God for their plight. They had the opportunity to be saved but refused it.

We generally judge the effectiveness of Christian service by how many people are saved. Perhaps there is a suggestion in this passage that it would be equally valid to judge it by how many people, after receiving a clear presentation of the Gospel, reject it and plunge into hell.

God is glorified in both cases. To Him there is the sweet incense of grace in the first instance and of justice in the second.

Solemn issues! No wonder the Apostle asks, in closing, “Who is sufficient for these things?”

Unrighteous Mammon

William MacDonald:

“If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches.” (Luke 16:11)

Unrighteous mammon here refers to earthly riches or material treasures. No illusion is more prevalent than that the man who has a lot of material possessions is rich. We speak of houses and land as real estate because we think they are real wealth. We speak of stocks and bonds as securities because we think they provide security.

But in Luke 16:11 the Lord distinguishes between the unrighteous mammon and true riches. The things men think are wealth aren't wealth at all.

John was a godly Christian who served as caretaker for a wealthy aristocrat's estate. One night John had a vivid dream in which he was told that the richest man in the valley would die before midnight the following evening. When John met his employer the next morning, he shared the dream with him. At first the millionaire pretended to be completely unconcerned. He never felt better. And he didn't believe in dreams anyway.

But as soon as John left, he called his chauffeur to drive him to the doctor's office. He told the doctor he wanted a complete physical checkup. As expected, the tests revealed that he was in splendid condition. And yet he was still worried about John's dream, so as he was leaving the doctor's office, he said, “By the way, Doctor, could you come to my house for supper tonight and for a visit afterwards.” The doctor agreed to come.

The supper went on routinely and they talked over a wide range of subjects. Several times the doctor made a start to leave, but each time the host prevailed upon him to stay a little longer.

Finally when the clock struck midnight, the godless rich man, greatly relieved, said goodnight to the doctor.

A few minutes later, the doorbell rang. When the gentleman opened the door, the adult daughter of old John stood there and said, “Please, sir, my mother wanted to let you know that my father had a heart attack and died a little while ago.”

The richest man in the valley had died that night.

William MacDonald:

One could scarcely read the New Testament even casually without realizing that the figure of warfare is often used to describe Christ's program on earth. True Christianity is far removed from the hurdy-gurdy entertainment of modern Christendom. It is not to be confused with the luxury-living and pleasure-seeking that are so rampant today. Rather, it is a struggle to the death, an unceasing conflict against the forces of hell. No disciple is worth his salt who does not realize that the battle is drawn and that there is no turning back.

In war, there must be unity. It is no time for petty bickering, for partisan jealousies, for divided loyalties. No house divided against itself can stand. Therefore, the soldiers of Christ must be united. The way to unity is through humility. This is clearly taught in Philippians 2. It is impossible to have strife with a truly humble man. It takes two to make a fight. "Only by pride cometh contention." Where there is no pride, there is no room for contention.

War demands austerity and sacrificial living. In wars of any consequence, there is invariably a vast system of rationing. It is high time that Christians realized that we are at war and that expenditures must be cut to a minimum so that as much of our resources as possible can be thrown into the struggle.

Not many see this as clearly as a young disciple named R_____ M_____. In 1960, he was president of the freshman class of a Christian school. During his term, it was proposed that expenditures be made for the usual class parties, jackets, and a class gift. Rather than approve such expenditures which did not contribute directly to the furtherance of the gospel, R_____ M_____ resigned from his post as president. The following letter was distributed to his fellow classmates on the day his resignation was announced:

Dear Classmates:

Since the matters of class parties, jackets, and the class gift have been brought before the Cabinet, I, as the president of the class have been considering the Christian attitude toward these areas.

I think we would find the greatest joy for our own selves in giving ourselves, our money, and our time entirely for Christ and for others, thus finding the reality of His Words: "He who loses his life for My sake will find it."

For Christians to spend their money and time on things that do not result in a definite witness to the unbeliever or for the building up of His children in Him would seem to be inconsistent with the facts that 7000 people die daily from starvation and over half the world has never heard of man's only Hope.

How much more glory we could give to God by helping to spread the Gospel to the other 60% of the world who have never heard of Jesus Christ or even in many neighboring homes instead of coming together in a little clique by ourselves, limiting our social well-roundedness to those of like mind, and wasting money and time for our own pleasure.

Since I am aware of specific needs and opportunities where finances can be used to such great advantage to the glory of Jesus Christ and for helping my neighbor here and abroad, it is impossible for me to allow class funds to be spent unnecessarily on ourselves. If I were one of those who are in so great a need, as I know of so many to be in, I would want those who have the ability to do all that they could to supply me with the Gospel and with my material needs.

"And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."

"But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

Therefore it is with love and prayer, that you might see the Lord Jesus giving His all (2 Corinthians 8:9), that I hereby submit to you my resignation as president of the class of '63.

In Him with you,

R_____ M_____

War demands suffering. If young men today are willing to lay down their lives for their country, how much more

willing should Christians be to lose their lives for Christ's sake and the gospel. A faith that costs nothing is worth nothing. If the Lord Jesus means anything to us at all, He should mean everything to us, and no considerations of personal safety or immunity from suffering should deter us in our service for Him.

When the apostle Paul sought to defend his apostleship against the attacks of his small-souled critics, he did not point to his family background or his education or his worldly attainments. Rather, he pointed to his sufferings for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I, forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

In delivering his noble challenge to son Timothy, he urged, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

War demands implicit obedience. A true soldier will follow the orders of his superior without questions and without delay. It is preposterous to think that Christ could be satisfied with anything less. As Creator and Redeemer, He has every right to expect that those who follow Him into battle will obey His orders promptly and completely.

War demands skill in the use of weapons. A Christian's weapons are prayer and the Word of God. He must give himself to fervent, believing, persevering prayer. Only thus can the strongholds of the enemy be pulled down. Then, too, he must be proficient in the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The enemy will do everything in his power to trick him into dropping this sword. He will cast doubts upon the inspiration of the Scriptures. He will point to alleged contradictions. He will bring opposing arguments from science and philosophy and human traditions. But the soldier of Christ must stand his ground, proving the effectiveness of his weapon by using it in season and out of season.

The weapons of the Christian warfare seem ridiculous to the man of the world. The plan that proved effective against Jericho would be ridiculed by military leaders today. Gideon's insignificant army would evoke only ridicule. And what shall we say of David's slingshot, of Shamgar's ox-goad, and of God's paltry army of fools down through the centuries? The spiritual mind knows that God is not on the side of the biggest battalions, but rather that He loves to take the weak and poor and despised things of this world and glorify Himself through them.

War demands a knowledge of the enemy and of his strategy. So it is in the Christian warfare. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). We know that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15). A trained Christian soldier knows that his bitterest opposition will not come from the drunkard, or the common thief, or the harlot, but rather from professed ministers of religion. It was the religious leaders who nailed the Christ of God to the cross. It was religious leaders who persecuted the early church. Paul met his most savage attacks from the hands of those who professed to be God's servants. So it has been down through the years. Satan's ministers are transformed as the ministers of righteousness. They speak religious language, they wear religious clothes, and they act with an affected piety, but their hearts are filled with hatred for Christ and for the gospel.

War demands undistractedness. "Every one who serves as a soldier avoids becoming entangled in the affairs of civil life, so that he may satisfy the officer who enlisted him" (2 Timothy 2:4, Weymouth). The disciple of Christ learns to be intolerant of anything that might stand between his soul and complete devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is ruthless without being offensive, firm without being discourteous. But he has one passion and one passion alone. Everything else must be brought into captivity.

War demands courage in the face of danger. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore...!" (Ephesians 6:13, 14a). It

has often been pointed out that the armor of the Christian soldier in Ephesians 6:13-18 makes no provision for retreat. Why retreat? If “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,” if no one can be successfully against us because God is for us, if victory is assured before we ever start to fight, how can we ever think of turning back?

What though I stand with the winners,
Or perish with those that fall?
Only the cowards are sinners,
Fighting the fight is all.
Strong is my foe, who advances,
Snapped is my blade, O Lord;
See their proud banners and lances—
But spare me the stub of a sword.

—quoted by Amy Carmichael

What Is True Greatness?

William MacDonald:

“...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” (Matt. 20:26, 27)

What is true greatness?

In the kingdom of this world, the great man is the one who has risen to a place of wealth and power. He has a retinue of aides and assistants, conditioned to follow his orders. He is accorded V.I.P. treatment and receives special favors wherever he goes. People regard him with respect and awe because of his rank. He never has to stoop to anything menial; there are always others to do that for him.

But in the Kingdom of our Lord, things are quite different. Here greatness is measured by the extent to which we serve rather than the extent to which we are served. The great man is the one who stoops to become a slave for others. No service is too menial. He does not expect any special treatment or thanks. When one of George Washington’s men saw him performing a menial service, he objected, saying, “General, you are too big a man to be doing that.” Washington replied, “Oh, no, I’m just the right size.”

Commenting on Luke 17:7-10, Roy Hession reminds us that “there are five marks of the bondsman: (1) He must be willing to have one thing on top of another put on him, without any consideration being given to him. (2) In doing this, he must be willing not to be thanked for it. (3) Having done all this, he must not charge the master with selfishness. (4) He must confess that he is an unprofitable servant. (5) He must admit that doing and bearing what he has in the way of meekness and humility, he has not done one stitch more than it was his duty to do.”

When our Lord left the heights of glory to become a Man on this planet, he “took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). He was among us as One who serves (Luke 22:27). He said, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). He girded Himself with a towel, the apron of a slave, and washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17).

“The servant is not greater than his lord” (John 13:16). If He stooped so low to serve us, why should we think it beneath our dignity to serve others?

Wast Thou, Savior, meek and lowly,
And will such a worm as I,
Weak and sinful and unholy
Dare to lift my head on high?

When Tolerance is Sin

William MacDonald:

Tolerance can be a virtue, but it can also betray an inexcusable weakness of character. We admire the person who tolerates differences where no great issue is at stake. He allows for a variety of preferences, methods and unimportant viewpoints. He would rather be killed for a sheep than for a lamb.

But there is another tolerance that is despicable. This is the willingness to remain silent when God's name is blasphemed or when Christ is dishonoured. It is the treachery of silence when truth is on the scaffold. It is the unwillingness to speak out against evil. Tolerance that condones deceit and unrighteousness is sin.

Those who think that Jesus was always tolerant should read Matthew 23, a denunciation of hypocrisy. This passage proves forever that our Lord was capable of scathing indignation at the pretence of religious leaders. Or they should read Revelation 2:20 where He condemned the church in Thyatira for tolerating a woman teacher named Jezebel.

Paul too was intolerant of evil. He even mentioned names, something that is considered unacceptable in evangelical circles today. He delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:20). He didn't hesitate to single out Hymenaeus and Philetus as false teachers (2 Timothy 2:17) and he denounced Alexander the coppersmith by name for his evil behaviour (2 Timothy 4:14).

John also had the courage to name Diotrephes as one who loved to have the pre-eminence (3 John 9).

It seems that the church today has lost its capacity for godly intolerance. As Robert G Lee said 'We live in a world of invertebrate theology, jellyfish morality, seesaw religion, India rubber convictions, somersault philosophy that tells us what we already know in words which we do not understand'.

The writings of William Barclay are another case in point. Barclay denies the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the miracles of Jesus and His substitutionary atonement. He believes in the eventual salvation of all mankind. Yet his books are sold in the majority of Christian bookstores. He is widely quoted by prominent evangelical leaders. And multitudes of Christians study his books on the specious excuse that 'they contain such valuable background information'. The fact that he is a heretic, a blasphemer and a deceiver is not important. Neither, apparently, is the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A missionary to India was right on target when he wrote 'Toleration has become so tolerant that evil is included in that tolerance. We are in danger of becoming "moral cows in our plump comfortableness"'.

It is an ungodly tolerance that has allowed so many pulpits in America to be filled with "false apostles and deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ". Detecting a resemblance to conditions in Elijah's day, J Sidlow Baxter writes 'Such are the people who today, with sickly kindness, will tolerate teachers of errors in our pulpits because they are such smooth-mannered and amiable gentlemen. They would rather allow error to be preached and souls to be deceived than hurt the preacher's feelings. Let Baal be worshipped rather than drought come! Let the cancer kill its victim rather than the cruel surgeon use the knife!...The best thing that could happen to some so-called Christian ministers of today is that they should be denounced in God's name by their hearers'.

It is a sinful tolerance [1] that refuses to castigate a false church system that leads millions to eternal destruction with its perverted gospel. [2] That honours its head as a great evangelist at the same time that he is condemning evangelicals as wolves. [3] That labels God's prophets as divisive when they denounce its idolatry, its mariolatry and its other heresies. [4] That sends converts back into its deadening clutches.

What has happened to the church of the martyrs?

We have an enormous craving for popularity. This is the stuff of which false prophets are made. We have a desire to avoid unpleasantness at all cost. A desire like this keeps us from confronting, from intervening when we should.

We have a distaste for being different. We find it easier to move along with the crowd, to drift with the tide. It is all too easy to remain silent when we are in an adverse theological climate. We are 'slaves who dare not to be right with two or three'.

We have lost the capacity for being angry. We are not easily enough disturbed. We are in the sorry state of having no capacity for indignation. We are experts at putting off decisiveness simply because we don't want to act.

Sometimes we are too blinded by friendship to stand against wrong. When a Christian spoke out against E J Carnell's book 'The Case For Orthodoxy' because it argued against the inspiration of the Scriptures, a friend of the author said 'Well you do not know him personally as I do. He is a gracious gentleman, a godly man'.

Jay Adams was right when he said 'In some circles, the fear of controversy is so great that preachers and congregations following after them will settle for peace at any cost - even the cost of the truth - God's truth. The idea is that peace is all- important. Peace is a biblical ideal...but so is purity. The peace of the church may never be bought at the price of the purity of the church. The price is too dear'.

Ecumenism and catholicity are two great buzzwords today. Let's all get together. Don't do or say anything to rock the boat. Doctrine divides, they say. What we need is unity.

What we really need is to contend earnestly for the faith in a day when it is being attacked, diluted and denied. We will be tolerant in matters of indifference but intolerant of departure from the truth of God. With Luther, 'Here we stand. We can do no other'.

William MacDonald:

God has called us to world dominion. It was never His intention that we should be “born a man and die a grocer.” It was not His purpose that we spend our lives as “minor officials in transient enterprises.”

When He originally created man, the Lord gave him dominion over the earth. He crowned him with glory and honor and put all things in subjection under his feet. Man was clothed with dignity and sovereignty—just slightly lower than that of the angels.

When he sinned, Adam forfeited much of the dominion that had been his by divine decree. Instead of exercising undisputed sway, he ruled unsteadily over an uncertain realm.

In the gospel, there is a sense in which we can regain dominion. It is not now a matter of control over snarling dogs or poisonous snakes—rather, it is claiming the heathen for our possession. “True imperialism is empire by moral and spiritual sovereignty; allurements and dominion by the fascinating radiance of a pure and sanctified life”—J. H. Jowett.

Actually, this dignity of the Christian calling is something that Adam never knew. We are partners with God in the world’s redemption. “This is our errand—to anoint men in the Name of the Lord to royalty of life, to sovereignty over self, to service for the realm”—Dinsdale T. Young.

The tragedy of much of life today is the failure to appreciate our high calling. We are content to spend our years “hugging the subordinate,” or “majoring in minors.” We creep instead of fly. We are slaves instead of kings. Few have the vision of claiming countries for Christ.

Spurgeon was an exception. He wrote the following dynamic message to his son:

I should not like you, if meant by God to be a missionary, to die a millionaire.

I should not like it, were you fitted to be a missionary, that you should drive down to a king.

What are all your kings, all your nobles, all your diadems, when you put them together, compared with the dignity of winning souls to Christ, with the special honor of building for Christ, not on another man’s foundation, but preaching Christ’s Gospel in regions far beyond?

Another exception was John Mott, well-known missionary statesman. When President Coolidge asked him to serve as ambassador to Japan, Mott replied, “Mr. President, since God called me to be an ambassador of His, my ears have been deaf to all other calls.”

Billy Graham tells of a third exception. “When the Standard Oil Company was looking in the Far East for a man, they chose a missionary to be their representative. They offered him ten thousand, and he turned it down; twenty-five thousand, and he turned it down; fifty thousand, and he turned it down. They said, ‘What’s wrong?’ He said, ‘Your price is all right, but your job is too small. God has called me to be a missionary.’”

The Christian’s calling is the noblest of all, and if we realize it, our lives will take on new loftiness. We will no longer speak of ourselves as “called to be a plumber” or “called to be a physicist” or “called to be a dentist.” Rather, we will see ourselves as “called to be an apostle”—and all these other things as mere means of livelihood.

We will see ourselves called to preach the gospel to every creature, to make disciples of all nations, to evangelize the world.

An immense task, you say? Immense, yes—but not impossible. The enormity of the task is indicated by the following graphic view of the world in miniature:

If in our imagination we could compress the present population of the world—now in excess of three billion people—into a group of a thousand persons living in a single town, the following is the picture of contrasts we would then vividly see.

Sixty persons would represent the U.S. population; all others would be represented by 940. The 60 Americans

would have 35% of the total income of the entire town; the 940 would share the other 65%.

Thirty-six of the Americans in the town would be (professing) Christian church members; and 24 would not. In the town as a whole, about 290 would be (professing) Christians and 710 would not. At least 80 persons in the whole town would be believing Communists and 370 would be under Communist domination. Possibly 70 in the whole town would be (professing) Protestant Christians.

Three hundred and three persons in the whole town would be white; 697 would be non-white. The 60 Americans would have an average life expectancy of 70 years; all the other 940 would average under 40.

The Americans would have 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ times as much per person as all the rest on an average. They would produce 16% of the town's total food supply, eat up all but 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ % of that total supply and keep most of it for their future use in expensive storage equipment. When it is remembered that most of the 940 non-Americans in the town would always be hungry and never know quite when they would get enough to eat, the situation created by this disparity in food supply and the existence of vast reserves becomes fairly apparent, particularly in view of the fact that the Americans already eat 72% above the optimum food requirements. They could actually save money by giving away excess food because of the cost of storing it, but they think that would be a dangerous "give-away program of soft-headed do gooders."

The 60 Americans would have, of the town's total supply, 12 times as much electric power as all the rest, 22 times as much coal, 21 times as much petroleum, 50 times as much steel and 50 times as much in general equipment.

The lowest income groups among the 60 Americans would be better off than the average in much of the rest of the town. Literally most of the non-American people in the town would be poor, hungry, sick and ignorant. Almost half would not be able to read or write. More than half would never have heard of Christ or what he stood for. But very soon more than half would be hearing about Karl Marx. (Words in parentheses have been added).

—Harry Smith Leiper

How then is the world going to be reached for Christ with the gospel in our generation? The answer—only by men and women who love God with all their hearts and who love their neighbors as themselves. It is only the devotion and dedication that spring from an undying love that will ever accomplish the task.

Those who are constrained by the love of Christ will count no sacrifice too great to make for Him. They will do because of love to Him what they would never do for worldly gain. They will not count their lives dear unto themselves. They will spend and be spent if only men might not perish for want of the gospel.

Lord Crucified, give me a heart like Thine!
Teach me to love the dying souls of men—
And keep my heart in closest touch with Thee;
And give me love—pure Calvary's Love
To bring the lost to Thee.

—James A. Stewart

Unless love is the motive, the cause is hopeless. It profits nothing. The ministry then becomes nothing more than sounding brass or clanging cymbals. But when love is the guiding star, when men go forth aflame with devotion to Christ, no power on earth can stop the onward sweep of the gospel.

Picture then a band of disciples, utterly sold out to Jesus Christ, driven by the love of Christ, traversing land and sea as heralds of a glorious message, tirelessly pressing on to new areas, finding in every life they meet a soul for whom Christ died, and coveting each one as a worshipper of the Savior throughout eternity. What method do these otherworldly men adopt in making Christ known?

The New Testament seems to present two principal methods of reaching the world with the gospel. The first is by public proclamation; the second is by private discipling.

As for the first, it was used commonly by the Lord Jesus and by His disciples. Wherever people were gathered together, there was an opportunity for preaching the good news. Thus we find gospel meetings in the market

places, in prisons, in the synagogues, on the beaches, and by the banks of rivers. The urgency and superlative character of the message made it unthinkable to limit it to conventional meeting places.

The second method of propagating the Christian faith is by private discipling of individuals. This is the method which the Lord Jesus used in the training of the twelve. He called this little band of men that they might be with Him and that He might send them forth. Day after day, He instructed them in the truth of God. He set before them the task to which they were appointed. He forewarned them in detail of the dangers and difficulties they would encounter. He took them into the private counsels of God and made them partners with Him in the glorious, yet arduous, divine plan. Then he sent them forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they launched forth to tell the world of a risen, ascended, glorified Savior. The effectiveness of this method is seen in the fact that the band of disciples, reduced to eleven by the defection of the traitor, turned the world upside down for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul not only practiced this method himself but urged it on Timothy as well. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). The first step is the careful and prayerful selection of faithful men. The second is the imparting to them of the glorious vision. The third is the sending forth of these men to make disciples of others (Matthew 28:19, ASV).

To those who lust for numbers and crave huge crowds, this method will seem dull and tedious. But God knows what He is doing, and His methods are the best methods. More can be accomplished for God by a few dedicated disciples than by a great army of self-satisfied religionists.

As these disciples go forth in the Name of Christ, they follow certain basic principles which are outlined in God’s Word. First of all, they are as wise as serpents, yet as harmless as doves. They draw on the resources of the Godhead for wisdom in the difficult path they have to tread. At the same time, they are meek and lowly in their contacts with their fellow men. None need fear physical violence from them; men need only to fear their prayers and their unquenchable witness.

These disciples keep themselves free from the politics of this world. They do not consider themselves as called to battle against any form of government or political ideology. They can operate under any form of government and be loyal to that government up to the point where they are required to compromise their testimony or deny their Lord. Then they refuse to obey and submit to the consequences. But they never conspire against a human government or engage in revolutionary tactics. Did not the Lord say, “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight?” These men are ambassadors of a heavenly country and thus pass through this world as pilgrims and strangers.

They are absolutely honest in all their dealings. They avoid subterfuge of all kinds. Their “yes” means yes, and their “no” means no. They refuse to adopt the popular lie that the end justifies the means. Under no circumstances will they do evil that good may come. Each one is an embodied conscience who would rather die than sin.

Another principle invariably followed by these men is that they anchor their work to the local church. They go out into the harvest field of the world to win converts to the Lord Jesus, but then they lead these converts into the fellowship of a local church where they can be strengthened and built up in their most holy faith. True disciples realize that the local church is God’s unit on earth for propagating the faith and that the best and most enduring work is built along these lines.

Disciples are wise to avoid entangling alliances of every kind. They steadfastly refuse to allow their movements to be dictated by any human organization. They receive their marching orders directly from headquarters in heaven. This does not mean that they operate without the confidence and commendation of Christians in their local church. On the contrary, they look upon such commendation as a confirmation of God’s call to service. But they insist on the necessity of serving Christ in obedience to His Word and to His guidance for them.

Finally, these disciples avoid publicity. They try to keep themselves in the background. Their purpose is to glorify Christ and to make Him known. They are not seeking great things for themselves. Neither do they want to reveal their strategy to the enemy. So they work on quietly and unostentatiously, oblivious of man’s praise or blame. They know that “heaven will be the best and safest place to learn the results of their labor.”

Worship Then and Now

William MacDonald:

David and the other writers of the Psalms were worshippers. They had great thoughts of God. The marvels of His creation swept them away in rapturous song. When they considered His greatness, goodness, and grace, their minds strained to take it all in. They thought of Him as the Upholder and Controller of all things and were confounded. The writer of the closing psalms was so overwhelmed that he called on all creation, animate and inanimate, to sing the praises of the Lord. All people great and small, old and young, kings and princes, yes, all angels, together with beasts, birds, and creeping things should form a universal choir. He enlists the accompaniment of all kinds of instruments – harps, trumpets, cornets, timbrels, cymbals, and organs. His subject is so amazing that he summons the sun, moon, and stars to join the anthem. The heavens, earth, sea, hills, mountains, and waters must not be silent. Fire, hail, snow, and stormy winds have their part. The subject is so breathtaking that the Lord is worthy of total praise, Ps. 150.

Yet these psalmists did not have a Bible. They did not know how the Son of God would come down to planet earth and be born in a cattle shed, His crib an animal's feed box. They did not know that wise men would see their God 'contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made Man'. Nor did they know that in that manger would lie the One 'who built the starry skies'. Hidden from their eyes was the truth that the babe in the manger would be 'the Eternal Word that spoke the worlds out of the womb of nothing, that the tiny arms of this helpless child were the hands of Him who laid the timbers of the universe' (Ian Macpherson).

They did not know that the Architect and Maker of the universe would one day wear a carpenter's apron in a place called Nazareth. Or that He would 'wander as a homeless stranger in the world His hands had made'. They would have gasped at the thought of God having no place to lay His head, or that He would sometimes sleep under the stars while His followers went to their homes.

Did they realize that God would actually come to earth and heal the sick, give sight to the blind, restore limbs to the maimed, cast out demons, and raise the dead? Or, that in spite of all His kindness, He would be insulted, ridiculed, and driven out of town?

It would have been incredible to them that He, the Judge of all, would be betrayed by one of His own, arrested, and put on trial. The civil authorities would find Him innocent, but He would be scourged until His back was like a furrowed field and He was no longer recognizable as a man.

The psalmists did not know in great detail what we now know. At a place called Calvary men would nail the One who is truly God to a cross of wood. It would be unimaginable to these Old Testament poets. They would have shaken their heads to think that the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His Person, the Maker and Upholder of the universe, was there on a cross, purging man's sins, Heb. 1. 1-3. Frail creatures took the One Who is high and lifted up in glory and lifted Him up on a pole of shame. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He was bound by nails. It was the Immortal who was dying.

Imagine the torrent of heavenly harmony that the psalmist's massed choir would have raised if they could have sung in the words of Charles Wesley:

Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, should die for me?

Or Isaac Watts' hymn that says:

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God.

They saw through a glass darkly. At times they had brief glimpses of what would happen, but the full revelation was not for them to know.

The thought is this. If they, with the limited knowledge they had, could have poured out such torrents of praise, worship, adoration, and thanksgiving to the Lord, how much more should we with what we know about Calvary and of the One who died there for us.

Once we grasp the truth of what our God has done for us, of the sacrifice He made to save us, we will be spontaneous and compulsive worshippers. No one will have to coax or cajole us to praise the Lord. Our tongues will be the pen of ready writers. Our lives will be one unending psalm of praise to Him. In the words of Charles Wesley, we will 'dissolve our hearts in thankfulness and melt our eyes in tears'. We will be 'lost in

Worship Then and Now

wonder, love, and praise', and 'drowned in love's mysterious deep'. Like the psalmist we will call on all creation to join us in singing the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

William MacDonald:

A disciple can be forgiven if he does not have great mental ability. He can be forgiven also if he does not display outstanding physical prowess. But no disciple can be excused if he does not have zeal. If his heart is not aflame with a red-hot passion for the Savior, he stands condemned.

After all, Christians are followers of the One Who said, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (John 2:17). Their Savior was consumed with a passion for God and for His interests. There is no room in His train for half-hearted followers.

The Lord Jesus lived in a state of spiritual tension. This is indicated by His words, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished” (Luke 12:50). And again by His memorable utterance, “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

The zeal of John the Baptist was attested by the Lord when He said, “He was a burning and a shining light” (John 5:35).

The apostle Paul was a zealot. Someone has tried to capture the fervency of his life in the following sketch:

He is a man without the care of making friends, without the hope or desire of worldly good, without the apprehension of worldly loss, without the care of life, without the fear of death. He is a man of no rank, country or condition. A man of one thought—the Gospel of Christ. A man of one purpose—the glory of God. A fool, and content to be reckoned a fool for Christ. Let him be called enthusiast, fanatic, babbler or any other outlandish nondescript the world may choose to denominate him. But still let him be nondescript. As soon as they call him trader, householder, citizen, man of wealth, man of the world, man of learning, or even man of common sense, it is all over with his character. He must speak or he must die, and though he should die, he will speak. He has no rest but hastens over land and sea, over rocks and trackless deserts. He cries aloud and spares not, and will not be hindered. In the prisons, he lifts up his voice, and in the tempests of the ocean, he is not silent. Before awful councils and throned kings, he witnesses in behalf of the truth. Nothing can quench his voice but death, and even in the article of death, before the knife has severed his head from his body, he speaks, he prays, he testifies, he confesses, he beseeches, he wars, and at length he blesses the cruel people.

Other men of God have shown this same burning desire to please God.

C. T. Studd once wrote:

Some want to live within the sound
Of church or chapel bell.
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.

And, incidentally, it was an article written by an atheist that spurred Studd to all-out dedication to Christ. The article was as follows:

If I firmly believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought, and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I should labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of Eternity alone. I would esteem one soul gained for heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences would never stay my hand, or seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its griefs, would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon Eternity alone, and on the immortal souls around me, soon to be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN IF HE GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND LOSE HIS OWN SOUL?

John Wesley was a man of zeal. He said, “Give me a hundred men who love God with all their hearts, and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world.”

Jim Elliot, martyr of Ecuador, was a torch of fire for Jesus Christ. One day, as he was meditating on the words,

“He maketh his ministers a flame of fire” (Hebrews 1:7), he wrote in his diary:

Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of “other things.” Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be a flame. But flame is transient, often short-lived. Canst thou bear this, my soul—short life? In me there dwells the Spirit of the Great Short-Lived, Whose zeal for God’s house consumed Him. “Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.”

The last line is quoted from a fervent poem of Amy Carmichael. It is little wonder that Jim Elliot drew inspiration from it:

From prayer that asks that I may be
Sheltered from winds that beat on Thee,
From fearing when I should aspire,
From faltering when I should climb higher,
From silken self, O Captain, free
Thy soldier who would follow Thee.

From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings;
Not thus are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the Crucified,
From all that dims Thy Calvary,
O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire,
Let me not sink to be a clod:
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.

The disgrace of the church in the twentieth century is that more zeal is evident among Communists and cultists than among Christians.

In 1903, one man with seventeen followers began his attack on the world. His name was Lenin. By 1918, the number had increased to forty thousand, and with that forty thousand, he gained control of the one hundred sixty million people of Russia. And the movement has gone on and now controls over one-third of the world’s population. However much one might be opposed to their principles, one cannot help admiring their zeal.

Many Christians felt strongly rebuked when Billy Graham first read the following letter, written by an American college student who had been converted to communism in Mexico. The purpose of the letter was to explain to his fiancée why he must break off their engagement:

We Communists have a high casualty rate. We’re the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered, and ridiculed and fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We Communists don’t have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes and new cars. We’ve been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, THE STRUGGLE FOR WORLD COMMUNISM.

We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves into a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard, or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind. There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens as time goes on. Therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I’ve already been in jail because of my ideas and if

necessary, Iâ'm ready to go before a firing squad.

If Communists can be as dedicated as this for their cause, how much more should Christians pour themselves out in loving, glad devotion for their glorious Lord. Surely if the Lord Jesus is worth anything, He is worth everything. "If the Christian faith is worth believing in at all, it is worth believing in heroically"—Findlay.

If God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if He has made it known, then it is a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies, or explains it away—James Denney.

God wants men who are completely turned over to the control of the Holy Spirit. These men will appear to others as if they were drunk with wine, but those who know better will realize that they are driven on by "a deep, enormous, haunting, never-sated thirst for God."

Let every would-be disciple take to heart the necessity of zeal in his life. Let him aspire to fulfill the description given by Bishop Ryle:

A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives, or whether he dies—whether he has health, or whether he has sickness, —whether he is rich or whether he is poor,—whether he pleases man, or whether he gives offence, —whether he is thought wise, or whether he is thought foolish—whether he gets blame, or whether he gets praise—whether he gets honor, or whether he gets shame—for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God's glory. If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it—he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such an one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach, and work, and give money, he will cry, and sigh, and pray. Yes: if he is only a pauper, on a perpetual bed of sickness, he will make the wheels of sin around him drive heavily, by continually interceding against it. If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will do the work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, on the hill (Exodus 17:9-13). If he is cut off from working himself, he will give the Lord no rest till help is raised up from another quarter, and the work is done. This is what I mean when I speak of "zeal" in religion.